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"DROP THAT PISON, YE FOOLISH CRITTER—WHAT ARE YE 'BOUT?" OLD SUNFLOWER CRIED.

Old Sunflower, THE SILENT SMITER; OR, The Man from Chicago in New York.

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"DICK TALBOT" SERIES, THE "FRESH
OF 'FRISCO TALES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. ON THE TRAIN.

By the Weehawken ferry-house, on the New York side, on a pleasant morning in June, stood a well-built, resolute-faced gentleman, neatly attired in dark clothes, quietly chewing a toothpick, but keeping a close watch, with his piercing, hawk-like eyes, on every man who passed.

This was John Mack, one of the Headquarters detectives, and reputed to be as smart a thief-taker as there was on the force.

He was now on the watch for a "wanted" party who, it was supposed, would attempt to escape from New York by way of the West Shore Railway, access to which is gained by the Weehawken Ferry line.

Down the street came a big, brawny, red-faced man of fifty or thereabouts, with long, tawny-gray hair, slightly curling, and peculiar chin-whiskers of the same hue.

His good-natured face attracted little children at the first glance, so full was it of the milk of human kindness.

"Hello! you are not going to leave us?" the detective exclaimed, extending his hand as the other came up.

"Why, Mack, is that you, I want to know? Put it thar, old man!" cried the new-comer in a deep, base voice as he grasped the hand of the other.

"Yes, sir-ee, hoss-fly! I am o. p. h!—off for the bounding per-a-ries of the wild and woolly West, the land of the settin' sun, whar the coyotes howl at the rising moon, and the yaller dogs bark in frantic joy as they chase the lively feal!

"The fact is, this hyer big, overgrown city is too rich for my blood! Every time I go downtown I git lost in the canyons, and I hev been expecting that some of yer darned, smart New York sharps would take me into camp and make a holy show out of me!"

"Well, I am sorry you are going," the detective announced. "Many a good laugh have we had at Headquarters over your Old Sunflower business!"

"Oh, yes, I am a sportive cuss when you get me going!" and the old man threw back his head, and his hearty "haw, haw!" rolled forth in sonorous volume.

"Say! I ain't sold those blamed brindle steers yet!" he announced, abruptly.

"Weight nigh onto two thousand apiece, and the nicest critters that ever chew a spear of per-a-riegass!"

"Reckon you don't know nobody what don't want to go into the show business, for to exhibit them brindle steers in a tent at fifty cents a head, hey? Thar's gobs of money into the rifle!"

"Ah, the way you played those brindle steers on us guileless New Yorkers was simply grand!" the detective asserted. "You take the cake, every time!"

"Take the cake! By gum! if I only git half a show for my white alley I'll walk off with the hull durned bake shop!"

"Wal, so-long! take keer of yourself! Be virtuous and you will be happy! I will come on and see you ag'in, the next time I git a leetle rusty and think my aged blood needs stirring up!" he said, in conclusion.

And then, with a parting shake of the hand, Jonathan Flowers, of Bitter Creek, Wyoming Territory, the owner of the great horse-breeding Sunflower Ranch, and popularly called Old Sunflower, passed on into the ferry-house, and then to the boat.

As it happened, he took a seat in the ladies' cabin, and his attention was soon attracted to a couple who sat on the opposite side of the boat.

A man of fifty, or thereabouts, tall, with a peculiar thin face, very white, and appearing much more so in contrast with the full black beard, and long hair of the same hue, which came in crispy ringlets half-way down to the coat-collar.

A foreigner—a Frenchman presumably, to judge from his face; a gentleman and man of education, apparently, and yet there was something about the man which immediately produced an unfavorable impression upon Old Sunflower.

"Mebbe I ain't much of a judge of character from a critter's looks," the Westerner muttered. "But if that galoot ain't a bad egg, then I don't know as much as I reckon I do!"

By the side of the Frenchman sat a slender,

well-dressed woman, very ladylike in her appearance.

She was closely veiled, but the Westerner had sharp eyes, and he fancied that he could detect that the woman was no girl; yet she was not old, possibly thirty-five, and had once been very beautiful, but now her face was thin and pale.

Her hair was as black as the raven's wing, and grew in wonderful profusion.

The eyes were as dark as the hair—great, lustrous eyes, and as their glances shot through the veil, the thought came to Old Sunflower that they strongly resembled the orbs of a hunted animal, weak and despairing, trying to escape from the pursuit of a merciless foe.

And the wily Westerner had not kept a wary watch many minutes before he noticed that the man's glance seldom wandered from his companion.

Twice, when he happened to turn his eyes on some one passing through the cabin, she made a movement as though she would rise and flee, but the moment she encountered his gaze she shrunk back as though she feared a coming blow.

"By goll it 'pears to me as if thar war some game going on hyer!" the big Westerner muttered.

"And if that is so you kin jest bet the hide and horns offen a two-year-old steer that a great, big, overgrown, innocent rustler, 'bout my size, will have a spoon in the soup, even if it is hot enuff to reach a critter clean 'way down to his lowest gizzard!"

When the boat made fast to the slip, and the passengers commenced to disembark, the woman did not offer to move until the man touched her on the arm, then she suddenly sprung to her feet, and looked as if she was going to seek refuge in flight, but the Frenchman was at her side in a moment, quickly drew her arm within his; the woman appeared to shrink from him, but so slight was the action that only a keen observer, like the old Westerner, would have been likely to notice it.

The pair followed the rest, and Old Sunflower brought up the rear.

"Mebbe this hyer thing is all right, and then ag'in mebbe it ain't," he muttered. "But one thing you kin bet yer boots on, and that is, a chap 'bout my heft is going to keep his eyes on these hyer mavericks until I git 'em well rounded up, and into a good corral, and don't you forget it!"

The Frenchman was so intent on watching his companion that he never noticed that Old Sunflower was playing the spy upon him.

The pair entered one of the railway cars, and as it was well filled they were obliged to take the last seat.

Right behind it was a single seat, in the corner of the car, which the big Westerner took, and then he leaned back in the corner, closing his eyes, as though he was half-asleep.

After settling himself comfortably in his seat the Frenchman cast a quick, nervous glance around.

The seats in the near neighborhood were filled with Italians, a dozen, or so, evidently newly arrived, in charge of an Americanized son of Italy, bound for some of the river towns.

They were jabbering away in Italian, and the Frenchman quickly concluded that these dull fellows would not be apt to pay any attention to himself or his companion.

Old Sunflower he took to be a countryman who had been sampling the liquid refreshments of great Gotham, and was now trying to sleep off the effects.

Satisfied with his inspection, the Frenchman drew a railway time-table from his pocket, and an exclamation of impatience escaped from him when he discovered the train was an "accommodation" one, stopping at all stations.

"Peste!" he muttered, "I had no idea this was not an Express. Bah! it will be a tiresome journey."

"Where are you taking me?" asked the woman, abruptly, her voice low, but deep, and very musical.

"Don't speak so loud!" he continued, harshly. "There isn't any need of letting everybody in the car know our business!"

"I will not go—I will get off!" the woman exclaimed in a deep, half-suppressed tone, and she made a movement as if to rise, but the strong hand of the man restrained her.

"Be quiet!" he exclaimed, angrily, but still careful to speak in a low tone.

At this moment the train started.

"You see it is too late, so be content, and do not make a fool of yourself," he continued.

The woman sunk back in her seat and a despairing sigh came from her lips.

"Long experience has taught me that it is impossible for me to contend with you," she moaned. "And when I think of the past it is dreadful to recall all I have suffered at your hands."

"I do not know what the future has in store for me" she continued. "But if I am doomed to suffer as much in the future as I have in the past I would gladly go into my grave now."

A peculiar expression came rapidly over the face of the Frenchman.

He threw a cautious glance around.

The Italians were busy in conversation, Old Sunflower reclined in his corner, apparently fast asleep, although in reality he was paying so much attention to the conversation that not a word of it escaped him.

"You are quite willing to die, then?" the Frenchman asked, in a sneering tone.

"Yes, I am," the woman replied, in tremulous tones. "I have been your slave now for years, and although I know that I really hate you, yet the strange, mystic power which you exert over me is so strong that I am fettered as though bound with an iron chain."

"Vainly, like the imprisoned bird, I would seek refuge in flight, so that I might escape from my thrall, but your will is stronger than mine and I cannot."

"That is certainly the truth," the Frenchman declared, in cold and icy tones.

"There is no escape for you except in going down into the grave."

"I know it, and now I am willing to die, for I am sick and tired of life."

"Well, I think you have come to a sensible conclusion, for I have grown fully as tired of you as you have of me," the man remarked.

"I too thought I loved you once, and if I had not I wouldn't have schemed and plotted as I did to make you my wife."

"But you are right, though, about our being bound together as by an iron chain," he continued. "That is a fact beyond the shadow of a doubt, and I can assure you, Jenella, the union galls me fully as much as it does you."

"Why do you not let me go, then?" the woman asked, in imploring tones.

"Because I dare not!" the man replied, lowering his voice to a deep whisper, but the precaution did not prevent Old Sunflower's quick ears from catching the words.

"You know too much about me. It would be dangerous for me to let you go, but if you want to die I will gladly furnish the means."

"Do so, and as quickly as possible, for I am so wretched that I will welcome death as a blessing!"

CHAPTER II.

IN WOODLAND WILD.

OLD SUNFLOWER was so much amazed by this strange conversation that it was as much as he could do to keep quiet.

"By gosh!" he muttered to himself, "I reckon thar is going to be some business hyer for a man 'bout my size, and jest as I was calculating, too, for to shake the dust of this hyer 'effete East' from my cowhides, and get to the land of the settin' sun as soon as the Lord would let me.

"But I have got to have a finger in this hyer pie, if I bu'st a suspender!"

"I tell you what it is, old man, mebbe you think you ar' going to git onto a shelf and stay thar, but I reckon Providence thinks thar is a heap of work in this hyer world yet for a tough old he-b'ar rustler of your kidney, so, when the call to duty comes, you will have to skip out lively to the front."

"Twas my impression the moment I set eyes onto this cuss that he wasn't a safe man to gamble on, and though second thoughts may be best, I reckon I am ready to bet 'bout a ton of the 'long green' that when I size a critter up at the first glance, I ain't more than two mile and a half out of the right road!"

"I can understand just how you feel," the Frenchman remarked. "I, too, have been so situated that the grave seemed to be the only place where I could find refuge."

"Yes, that is the truth. My life is a torment. I am your slave, and you have me so utterly in your power that you seem to have taken possession of my very soul!" the woman exclaimed, impulsively.

"Well, I have seen for quite a time that matters were coming to a crisis, and as I did not dare to allow you to go free, I made arrangements to put you in a place where you will be well taken care of, but it is a place where, if you should be imprudent enough to reveal any of my secrets, no one would take any notice of your disclosures."

The woman looked at the speaker in unfeigned wonder.

"I do not understand," she said, slowly.

"You see, my dear Jenella, I did not deem it wise to explain the matter until I got you fairly on the road; but the fact is, you are now on your way to a private lunatic asylum."

"A mad-house?" the woman gasped.

"Exactly, and that is where I have made up my mind to keep you for the remainder of your natural existence," the Frenchman remarked, in a cool, deliberate way.

"Oh, but this is monstrous!" the woman declared. "I am not mad!"

"You think so, naturally, but, to speak the honest truth, I am quite sure your head is affected, for you certainly are subject to very strange delusions."

"Take, for instance, this idea of yours that I possess some unnatural power which compels you to do my bidding, no matter how much you may be inclined not to obey."

"But it is the truth!" the woman protested. "Vainly, from the very beginning, have I endeavored to resist the strange influence which you exercise over me, but I cannot. You have the power to charm me with your eyes, as the serpent charms the bird, and, like the feathered songster, I have been helplessly drawn to utter ruin."

"Now, my dear Jenella, see how absurd that story is!" the man exclaimed.

"A woman in full possession of her senses would never make such a statement."

"It is the truth—I swear it!" the woman declared.

"Of course, I do not doubt that you are honest in saying so; all people who are subject to delusions believe falsehood to be the truth."

"Really, though, I believed I was doing you a service by securing accommodations for you in this asylum," he continued. "It is not a public mad-house, you know, but a private retreat where only patients are taken whose friends can afford to pay well for them. You will find it to be a very select place; you will be removed from all care—all anxiety, and if you should be ever foolish enough to babble in regard to my affairs, no one will pay the slightest attention to you, for, of course, all will regard your stories as the products of a disordered mind."

"No, no, I will not go!" the woman exclaimed, in a voice full of horror.

"My heavens! it would be too dreadfull! To be shut up with wretched mad creatures all the rest of my days—the thought is awful!"

"Ah, well, you see, it is not so bad as you think. The most of the patients, I fancy, are like yourself, prone to delusions about certain things, but all right in other respects."

"This is a very particular place, you must understand," he continued. "The charges are high, and the proprietor is noted for being a man who attends strictly to his own business—always."

"No, no, I do not want to go there—be merciful and let me die instead," the woman implored.

"I know that you always carry the means of death on your person," she continued. "Give me then to drink of some subtle poison which has the power to still the red life-current, to change the quick and the living into the cold and senseless clay, and with my dying breath I will thank you for the gift!"

The Frenchman meditated over the matter for a few moments, his brows dark with thought.

"Really, upon the whole, I think you have come to a wise decision," he observed, slowly.

"Life for you holds no charms; why, then, should you cumber the earth with a worthless existence? You are better out of the world than in it, but I doubt whether you will have the courage to commit the act of self-destruction."

"Oh, no, I will not falter!" she protested.

"I have in my medicine-case"—and the Frenchman tapped his breast-pocket—"a certain small vial and a few drops of its contents will soon throw you into the sleep which knows no waking.

"The death is a painless one, and almost before the taker of the dose is aware of a change, the passage of the dark river is made; earth and all its cares are left behind and the glorious unknown world of eternity is gained."

The voice of the Frenchman was low and solemn, like the tones of a mystic priest of one of the ancient dead and gone religions, participating in a sacred rite.

"Give me the chance and see how quickly, and how gladly, I will bid the world good-night," the woman exclaimed, seemingly under a spell wrought by the white-faced foreigner.

The Frenchman consulted his time-table, then mused in silence for a moment.

"I think I can arrange the matter," he said, in a meditative way. "As it happens, I am well-acquainted with the country in the neighborhood of one of the small stations a few miles up the road.

"There is a little settlement clustered around the dépôt, but in the interior the country is almost a wilderness.

"We will leave the train at this station, and take one of the country roads, then; when we reach a lonely spot, secure from observation, I will give you the vial and you can seek the forgetfulness you crave."

"Very well, I am satisfied, and when the time comes for me to take the leap into the dark, which is so dreadful to most minds, you will find that, weak woman as I am, my sorrows will give me courage to take the step without shrinking."

The approach of the conductor at this moment put an end to the conversation.

Old Sunflower was so boiling over with indignation that he muttered to himself:

"I must really spit out a few good, round, hard, cuss-words, or else I shall bu'st!

"The mean, miserable, white-livered, slab-sided son of a pole-cat!

"Dog-gone his ugly carcass! I would like to take him by the scruff of the neck and chuck him into a canyon 'bout four miles deep!

"Oh, ain't I going to take a hand in this hyer

picnic? If I don't, I hope I may be kicked to death by crippled grasshoppers!"

Neither the Frenchman nor the woman spoke again, but when the train stopped at one of the small stations, he touched her on the arm, rose, and they departed.

Old Sunflower hastened through the car and got off at the upper end, but not on the side where the dépôt stood, so the train hid him from the view of those on the station platform.

Then he started up the track and kept on until the train passed.

As soon as the last car rattled by, the Westerner cast a hasty glance over his shoulder.

The Frenchman and his companion were just disappearing down a pass which led from the upper end of the station to the eastward, but the other three people who got off, took a broad road, running up alongside of the track, then bending to the west.

This led Old Sunflower to conclude that the road taken by the pair was a mere by-path.

"So much the easier then for me to trail 'em!" he muttered.

"And as the country to the east'ard of the track 'pears to be mighty rough and broken, I reckon the road will be a crooked one, and if it is I ought to be able to make a good job outen the thing."

Then the Westerner left the iron way and, facing about, struck off at an angle so as to reach the narrow road.

As he turned into it he caught sight of the woman's dress, the couple going around a bend in the road.

"Oh, now, this hyer is a streak of luck!" the Westerner declared.

"This is jest old pie! If the road keeps on as it begins, narrow and crooked, and fringed with bushes, I will be able, mebbe, to upset this blamed frog-eater's apple-cart!"

"I must be keerful though that I don't run inter 'em when they stop, 'cos that would put all the fat in the fire."

The big Westerner evidently had a natural talent for this sort of work, for he managed to keep so near to the pair that he was favored every now and then by the sight of the woman's dress, as she and her companion turned bends in the road.

The trailer was favored by the circumstance that the Frenchman had no suspicion there was danger of any one playing the spy.

When he turned into the road from the track he had taken a careful glance around.

All within sight were heading in the opposite direction, and as no one was paying the slightest attention to him, he fancied he was unobserved.

For fifteen minutes the pair proceeded, Old Sunflower tracking them as steadily as ever a red Indian trailed a foe.

Not a house was there on the road, and now it was but little better than a cow-path, grass and weeds growing thickly in it, although a vehicle could have managed to get through.

Then, when the Frenchman came to where a still smaller path led from the one which he was on, he turned into it, the woman following in his footsteps, as there was not room for two abreast.

Old Sunflower was so near that he was able to distinguish the figure of the woman as she passed into the bushes.

"Oho! I reckon the pesky cuss is mighty near the spot whar he calculates to pull this hyer thing off, but I'll bet a house and lot this leetle surprise party, which I am going to spring on him, will be apt to startle his weak nerves—scare him out of a year's growth, mebbel!" the big Westerner ejaculated, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER III.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

As Old Sunflower had anticipated, a hundred yards down the little, blind path was the spot which the Frenchman had selected for the scene of the tragedy.

It was an abandoned stone quarry.

There was an open, circular space, about a hundred feet in diameter, into which the path led, and then a broken, irregular rocky wall rose high in the air.

Scattered around were blocks of worthless stone.

"Here, madam, is a suitable spot for you to play the last act of your life drama," the Frenchman remarked, as he halted in the open space, turning to face the woman.

"I do not falter," she replied, throwing up the veil which had partially concealed her face. "Give me the vial, and I will drink the contents without shrinking, even though it is as bitter as gall!"

"The potion is almost tasteless, but the result certain. The skill of man has never devised a more speedy or pleasant road to the gates of paradise, or to the jaws of the infernal regions," the Frenchman remarked in his sneering, sarcastic way.

"Whether I go to the one or the other I care not, for I am utterly wretched and desperate, but if there is justice hereafter, I think I may hope for mercy, for until I came into your power, although I was vain, weak and frivolous, yet I was not really wicked."

"I was your bad angel," he sneered.

"Yes, that is the truth, if ever the truth was spoken in this world!

"But give me the drug, and let me go hence, for I am sick and tired of life."

The Frenchman drew from his breast-pocket a leather medicine-case, took from it a small vial, which contained a colorless liquid, held it up to the light and examined it for a moment, then extended his hand to the woman.

"Here is the elixir of immortality!" he exclaimed.

"A few drops of that upon your tongue, and then, as it courses with magic swiftness through your veins, the dull realities of this life will fade from your sight, and before you know it the passage to the other world will be made."

"I am content to tread the path!" she declared. "See! my hand is firm as I take the vial!"

And this was the truth, for it did not quiver as she held up the instrument of death.

"Whatever my faults may be, no one can say with truth that I was ever a coward!

"And now here, on my knees, I take my leave of this cruel world!"

She knelt as she spoke, removed the rubber stopper from the vial and carried it to her lips, the Frenchman standing with folded arms and regarding her with a sardonic smile.

But the potent fluid never reached the lips of the woman, for, aided by some friendly evergreen trees, Old Sunflower had managed to make his way to within twenty feet of the pair, and at this critical moment he sprung from his ambush.

"Drop that pison, ye foolish critter—what are ye 'bout?" Old Sunflower cried.

Startled by the sudden and unexpected interruption, the nervous hand of the woman released its grasp on the vial.

Down it went, striking upon a stone, breaking into a dozen pieces.

The Frenchman started, but quickly recovered himself, and forcing a laugh, exclaimed:

"Well, really, we ought to put this in the play, for it would make a splendid tableau!"

"I would like to put you in the jail, you miserable apology for a man!" the Westerner cried, shaking his big fist at the Frenchman.

The woman was glaring at the intruder as though she was bereft of her senses, and then, the tension of the nervous excitement suddenly giving way, she uttered a low moan and fainted, falling prostrate on the ground.

"There, do you see what mischief you have done with your unwarrantable intrusion?" the Frenchman exclaimed, fiercely.

"The lady and I were rehearsing our parts in a new play, which we are going to bring out, and you rush in here like a mad bull, frightening the very wits out of her!"

And as he ended the sentence, he made a movement as if to advance to the assistance of the helpless woman.

"Keep back! don't you dare to touch her, or I'll warm you as you were never warmed in your life!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, brandishing his big fists in an extremely hostile manner.

"Really, sir, this language is outrageous!" the other declared, drawing himself up in an indignant way.

"Oh, git out! I ain't got no time to chew my words when I git a-talking with a cuss of your kind!"

"Say, I reckon you take me for the biggest kind of a country Jake, don't you!—a-tryin' to stuff me with this yarn 'bout how you are practicin' for a play—bosh!"

"You are not fool enough to suppose the lady was really going to kill herself, are you?" the Frenchman exclaimed, scornfully.

"I reckon that was her leetle game, and if I hadn't come bounding through the bushes, she would be on the other side of Jordan by this time," the Westerner replied.

"The idea is ridiculous!" the Frenchman declared. "Do you suppose I would stand tamely by and see the woman kill herself?"

"Yes, you would!" Old Sunflower retorted, immediately. "That is jest the kind of a no-souled polecat you are!"

"Mebbe you think you can pull the wool over my eyes, and if you do, I can tell you a bigger mistake than that 'ar one was never made!"

"Oh, you miserable, sneaking coyote! I am onto you like a thousand of bricks!" And again he shook his brawny fist at the Frenchman, who regarded him with a scornful smile.

"I shall treat your foul language with the contempt which such blackguardism deserves," he declared.

"It is plain to me that you are a low, ignorant fellow, one utterly unworthy the attention of a gentleman, and therefore beneath my notice."

"Oh, yes, all sich talk as that don't go, you know!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"You ain't the kind of man for to ride the high hoss, and do the job up brown! You ain't wool, nor a yard wide, and won't wash, nohow you kin fix it!"

"As I told you before you can't throw no dust in my eyes! I won't have it for a cent!"

I am up to all your tricks! I sat behind you in the car and heard every word of the conversation between you and this unfortunate woman, and so I know the game as well as though I had got the thing up myself!"

For a moment the Frenchman was disconcerted; a dark and angry look appeared on his face; he clinched up his fists and made a movement as though he intended to spring upon the Westerner.

"Come on!" Old Sunflower cried. "Hop right in, Johnny, and give me a chance to show you how a rustling galoot from the Wild West kin handle himself!"

"Oho! it won't take me more than a minute to pound a heap of sense into you!"

"Bah! do you think I would condescend to a bout at fisticuffs with such a fellow as you are?" the Frenchman exclaimed with supreme contempt, and he put his hands in the pockets of his loose sack-coat, as though resolved not to be provoked into an encounter.

"I am a gentleman, and when I fight, sir, it is with either swords or pistols," he added. "And, of course, such a man as you are would shrink from an encounter with weapons."

"You jest hold your hoses, stranger!" the big Westerner exclaimed. "Mebbe I ain't so green as I look! I reckon I would have to pass on swords, for in this hyer country we don't go much on toad-stickers, but when you come to 'gums,' by gosh! you hit me jest whar I live!"

"I am your grasshopper thar with anything in that line, from a pea-shooter up to a cannon, but a revolver, or a rifle is my best holt!"

"As I informed you before, sir, I do not care to quarrel with you, notwithstanding the fact of this unwarranted interference in my affairs," the Frenchman declared with haughty cent.

"But if you overheard the conversation between my wife and myself in the car, you must understand the situation then," he continued.

"I reckon I do! You told the poor woman that you were carrying her to a mad-house, and when she said she would rather die than go to an asylum, you egged her on all you could, and I really do reckon it was the meanest trick I ever heered on in all my born days!" the old Westerner declared, emphatically.

"She is a lunatic!" the Frenchman exclaimed. "She has been subject to insane delusions for years, and lately has become so violent that it has not been possible for me to get along with her, and so I arranged accommodations in a secure retreat, where she will be comfortable, but when she declared she would rather die I, after reflecting upon the matter for a moment, came to the conclusion she was right."

"I am aware this is not the way the customs of the world would regulate this matter, but I am an advanced thinker and care nothing for the traditions of the past; I hold it to be perfectly just and proper that when a mortal becomes tired of life he or she should not be prevented from taking passage to another world."

"You are a gol-darned, no-souled murderer, by gum!" the big Westerner exclaimed, heatedly. "And it is my private opinion, publicly expressed, that you ain't got any more conscience than a per-a-rie skunk!"

"I did not ask you to sit in judgment upon me!" the Frenchman retorted in lofty scorn.

"You didn't ask me, hey?" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"No, I did not! What do you suppose I care for the opinion of a man like yourself?"

"By gosh! I know I ain't rigged out in quite as good harness as you ar', but I have got a heart in my bosom, I want you to know, and that is a durned sight more than you have, for all your big talk!"

"Can't you see that it was an act of mercy for me to assist this woman to leave a world where she was thoroughly miserable?" the Frenchman argued.

"No, I don't!" Old Sunflower retorted. "I don't see ary bit of reason in any sich foolishness!"

"You are her husband, and it is your duty to love, cherish, and protect her as long as you live!"

"You may think you are a fine preacher, but I don't believe you will ever succeed in convincing any ole' else that you are gifted in that line," the Frenchman sneered.

"Say, you ain't a handsome man at any time," Old Sunflower declared. "And when you try to be sarcastic you look for the world like a devil!"

"I don't take ary bit of stock in you," he continued. "And I reckon too, that this yarn 'bout the woman being insane is only a ghost-story. I don't doubt that you have about driven her crazy by a system of reg'lar fiendish persecution, but if she was tak'n away from you she would be all right."

"I have an official document, issued by a police justice of the City of New York, upon the sworn testimony of two reputable doctors, certifying that my wife is insane and not fit to be at large," the Frenchman declared.

"I don't suppose you know anything about such a matter, but before a person can be committed to an asy'um, it is necessary to have a legal paper of this kind."

"Bosh! I wouldn't give the wag of a mule's

tail for a bushel of sich things!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Money will work the trick every time, for there are plenty of rascally doctors who can be bought!"

Then came the sharp report of a pistol.

CHAPTER IV.

A PERILOUS POSITION.

ALTHOUGH Old Sunflower was a shrewd, cunning man of the world, possessed of vast experience, yet he fell a victim to the Frenchman's trickery.

The white-faced, dark-browed man had, apparently, put his hands in his pockets as a safeguard against being provoked into a personal encounter with the big Westerner, but, in reality, the movement was made so he could grasp a weapon—a revolver, which he had concealed in the right-hand pocket, and then, taking advantage of a favorable opportunity, he fired the pistol, point-blank, at Old Sunflower, discharging it through the lining of his coat without taking the trouble to draw the weapon.

The big Westerner threw up his hands, uttered an exclamation of pain, and then sunk to the ground.

"Take that, you meddling fool!" the Frenchman cried, as he fired the shot.

"And if you are not killed outright, let it be a warning to you in the future not to meddle with matters which do not concern you!"

The bullet had, apparently, been a fatal one, though, for Old Sunflower never stirred after he went down.

"The idiot has disarranged my plans, and I must form new ones," the Frenchman soliloquized.

"And since I have gone so far in this matter, I might as well keep on to the end," he continued.

"It was unwise of me to come to the conclusion that if I put this woman in an asylum, there was little likelihood of her ever being able to endanger my safety.

"While she lives, I am in constant danger, no matter where she is.

"In the asylum she may recover her health, and, freed from the restraint of my presence, her courage may return, and the desire to mingle again with the world.

"An asylum is not a prison, and the patients often escape, and if she were once to gain her liberty, the idea might come to her to seek vengeance upon me for having wrecked her life. Against that contingency I must provide.

"This woman's lips must be closed in death!" he cried, in fierce determination. "There is no doubt about the matter. I cannot breathe freely while she lives.

"Unfortunately, I have no more of the poison with me, but I can carry her to the house, and keep her there, until I can procure some from New York.

"As long as I have entered upon this path, I might as well tread it to the end!"

The woman still lay motionless upon the ground, as lifeless to all appearances as the big Westerner, who had been cut down in so ruthless a manner by the bullet of the merciless Frenchman.

She was slightly built, and had but little flesh on her bones, therefore the Frenchman, who was muscular and strong, although not appearing so, for he was a deceptive man in this respect, was able to take the woman up bodily in his arms and carry her off without difficulty, disappearing amid the bushes.

For a good ten minutes solitude reigned in the lonely glade, and then down the hillside to the west of the rocky wall, following a path so indistinct that only the eyes of one accustomed to the neighborhood would be likely to distinguish it, came a girl of eighteen, plainly dressed in calico, after the country fashion, with a broad-brimmed straw hat.

She was a robust, pleasant-looking lass, with a round face, black eyes and hair, a superior sort of an Irish peasant girl, transported from the bogs of the Emerald Isle to the "Land of the Free."

She had a parcel of groceries in her hand, and was evidently returning from the village by a short cut through the woodland.

As she came down the hillside, she perceived the fallen man by the huge stone block.

"Oh, what is the matter here, I wonder?" she exclaimed, coming to a halt.

"The man is dead, I believe! Oh, isn't this awful?"

But, in spite of the horror which she felt at the sight, her curiosity impelled her to come forward and make an examination, although at first she was inclined to take a wide *detour* around the body and get away from the sight as soon as possible.

"But it wouldn't be right!" she argued, resisting the impulse.

"The poor man may not be dead, and perhaps I can be of some help to him."

And so, conquering her repugnance, she approached the big Westerner.

"Oh, he is dead, I guess, sure enough!" the girl exclaimed, as she looked upon Old Sunflower's quiet face.

Upon his forehead, just where the edge of the hat came, there was a blood-stain—not a large one, but enough to make the girl shudder when she caught sight of it.

"He has hurt his head in some way," she murmured.

Then she put her hand on his pulse, and, to her surprise, discovered it had not ceased beating.

The movement was a feeble one, but sufficient to show that life was not extinct.

"How lucky that I have father's whisky in my pocket!" she exclaimed, producing a pint flask as she spoke.

She changed her position so she could take the big Westerner's head upon her knee, raising it from the ground, then poured a swallow of the potent fluid down his throat.

The stuff was the genuine country "tanglefoot," warranted to burn all the way down, almost clear alcohol, and it produced an instantaneous effect upon the wounded man.

He gave a slight gasp, and moved his lips in a feeble way.

"Ah! it's all right!" the girl cried, in delight.

"He is not dead, and the whisky will bring him around; it is the first time I ever knew the miserable stuff to do any good," her full red lips curling in contempt.

Forcing the neck of the flask in between the teeth of the helpless man, she poured a generous draught of the liquor down Old Sunflower's throat.

Another gasp came from the Westerner as the fiery stuff burnt its way along his gullet, then he opened his eyes and stared in the face of the young Irish girl.

"Well, you are not dead, anyway, and that is a comfort!" she cried.

Old Sunflower's recovery was rapid.

With a sort of a hoarse grunt he rose to a sitting posture, and, glancing around, shook his head ruefully.

"How do you feel now, sir?" the Irish girl asked, very much interested.

"Wal, I reckon that ain't an easy question to answer," the big Westerner replied. "I think, though, as near as I kin git at it, that I feel as if a brick house had come down on top of me."

"How did you happen to hurt yourself, sir? There's blood on your forehead."

Old Sunflower put his hand up, pushed back his broad-brimmed felt hat, and the wound on his head could be plainly seen.

It began near the center of the forehead, about an inch below the growth of the hair, into which it ran.

"A pretty lively little scratch, by gum!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"If it had been 'bout half an inch deeper I reckon it would have settled my account with this world, but I ain't grumblin' 'bout it, for the old saying 'bout a miss being as good as a mile fits in hyer fu'st-rate!"

In the excitement of the moment the Frenchman had not been able to take accurate aim; then too, being obliged to discharge his revolver under such disadvantageous circumstances militated against good marksmanship.

It had been his intention to shoot the intruder in the head; the Westerner being such a big, strong fellow, he was afraid he would not be able to stop him if he aimed at his body, and he felt satisfied that if he did not disable his antagonist at the first shot he would not get a chance to fire another, his idea being that if the big fellow ever got a chance at him at close quarters he would be badly damaged.

Owing to these circumstances the bullet had just plowed its way through the outer surface of Old Sunflower's head, stunning him for the time being, but really doing but little damage.

The stout hat too had served to deflect the bullet a little, and thus the big Westerner had escaped death by the skin of his teeth, as it were.

"It is a bad wound!" the girl declared, deceived by the blood which had clotted amid Old Sunflower's tawny locks. "How did you happen to get it? Did you fall?"

"Nary time! A white-faced, black-bearded, no-account, measly Frenchman made a target out of me, gol-durned him!" Old Sunflower declared, leaning back against a stone, for he was still weak from the effect of the shock.

"The doctor!" cried the girl in great surprise.

"Oh, he is a doctor, is he? B'gosh! the next time I meet him I reckon I will put the cuss in a condition to take some of his own medicine, or else I ain't as good a rustler as I take myself to be!"

The girl now comprehended that she had made a mistake in betraying any knowledge of the man. She got very red in the face, and attempted to regain the error by saying:

"Perhaps I am wrong. I was thinking that it might be the doctor who sometimes comes to the woods here after roots."

"Oh, come now, young gal, don't try to tell me any fairy tales!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, shaking his head gravely.

"You made a bad break, of course, by letting on that you knew the man, but as he is an odd-looking galoot you recognized him the moment

I gave his description, and so you blurted out that he was called the doctor.

"Now, that is all right, you couldn't help it; most anybody would have done the same thing under the circumstances, but now the mischief is done, don't attempt to wriggle out of it."

"You tried to do all you could for me, and I am very much obliged to you. From your face I have got the idea that you are a good, honest girl, and I don't want you to do anything to give me a contrary opinion."

The girl became very much confused, blushing from her neck to the forehead, and she did not know what to say.

"Kinder bothered ain't ye?" Old Sunflower remarked, in a kindly manner. "You needn't take on a mite, and we will drop the subject right now. I don't ask you to give the critter away, and I will never say a word to him or anybody else 'bout your saying anything 'bout him. I can hunt him up easy enough when I git ready to square this little account!"

The sound of footsteps interrupted the conversation.

Into the open space came a tall, red-bearded Irishman, carrying a pickax on his shoulder, and a short, clumsy-built fellow, whose dark face told that he was an Italian, bearing a spade.

The girl sprung to her feet with a cry of alarm, and got before the Westerner as if to shield him from sight.

"Oh, sir, I fear they mean you harm," she cried.

"The spalpeen of a spy is alive! kill him, bad 'cess to him!" cried the Irishman.

Then with a shout of rage the two brandished their tools in the air and rushed toward the Westerner.

"B'gosh! this looks like war!" cried Old Sunflower.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVANCE IN FORCE.

THE girl stood before the Westerner with outstretched arms.

Little wonder the brave Irish girl was alarmed for Old Sunflower's safety, for two more villainous-looking cut-throats than the pair it would be hard to find.

"Oh, father! what are you after doing?" the girl cried, still resolutely keeping her position in front of the reclining man despite the threatening advance of the new-comers.

"What are ye doing here wid that blaggard?" the old Irishman demanded, as he and his companion came to a halt a yard or so from the girl, but still brandishing their tools in a menacing way.

"Oh, father, the gentleman has been hurted!" the girl explained.

"It is kilt the blaggard is—or he ought to be," the Irishman retorted, ferociously. "And me and the Ginney here have come to be afther burying him!"

"I say, if it is all the same to you, I had rather you would postpone that leetle operation for a while!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"I may be mistaken 'bout this hyer thing, for this is a mighty onsert'in world, where nothing can be counted on but death and taxes; but it is my opinio that I am as lively a cold corpus as you kin strike in a day's journey!"

"You see, father, the gentleman is not dead—in fact, he isn't much injured, and is all ready to go away," the girl pleaded.

"He is going into his grave, bad 'cess to him for a murthuring thafe of a spy!" the old Irishman cried.

"But when he was afther coming down here to git dacint min in trouble, it is a mighty big blunder he made; but we will quietly knock him in the head, and thin that will end the matter, hey, Ginney?"

"Me killa him!" declared the Italian, raising the spade high in the air.

"Take to yer heels, Maggie, ye baggage, and run for yer life, while we make mince-meat out of the blaggard!" the old Irishman roared.

"Oh, father, you are surely out of your senses!" the girl declared. "You will only get yourself hanged if you are not careful!"

"Say, leetle gal, jest step to one side a moment and give me a chance to talk to these bloodthirsty scoundrels!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

There was something in his voice which seemed to command obedience, and so the girl complied with the request.

"Now, then, you mutton-headed, slab-sided sons of guns!" Old Sunflower cried.

These uncomplimentary and unexpected words provoked exclamations of rage from the two, and they swung their tools on high preparatory to a good rush at the Westerner.

But the rush was never made, for, at the conclusion of the speech, Old Sunflower whipped out a revolver from his waistband and opened fire on the pair.

At the first shot, which went through the bushy whiskers of the old Irishman, so close to the flesh that the man felt the wind of the ball, the two lost all interest in the proceedings.

Down went the pick-ax and the spade, and away the fellows ran for dear life, the big Westerner sending another shot after them to hasten their speed.

"Come back hyer, you long-eared apes!" Old Sunflower yelled, rising as he spoke and taking a seat on the stone.

"Come back hyer and git yer grave ready; then I will fix the both on yer for planting, and I won't charge ye a gol-durned cent for it either!"

But the fugitives never heeded the invitation; they kept on at the top of their speed, disappearing in the bushes, in a few moments.

"Whar are they going, gal?—whar does that path lead to?" the Westerner asked.

"To the river, and by the water's edge are three houses; my father lives in one, the Italian in the other, and the third is deserted."

"And ther galoots ar' taking leg-bail for the houses, I reckon?"

"Yes, the path only leads to the houses and the river."

"See hyer, leetle gal, I have got to put you through a cross examination—do you know what that means?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I have had good schooling."

"Wal, you look as if you had," Old Sunflower observed. "I wouldn't git you mixed up in this hyer affair if you hadn't already got into it. Those two cuss-s ar' going to be powerful mad 'cos you tried to help me, and mebbe they will go for to git back at you."

"No, sir, I don't really think they will when I explain the circumstances to them," the girl replied. "I found you here wounded, and it is only natural I should try to help you; and then though my father is hard and cross to me, yet he has never tried to injure me, and, in fact, sir, I wouldn't let him!" she declared, spiritedly.

"I am big and strong, as my mother was before me, and I would not stand being abused any more than she would."

"My father is a tall man, and looks strong, but he isn't, and I could beat both him and the Ginney together, if I was to be attacked by them."

"I reckon you are right; you look as if you could," the Westerner remarked, with an admiring look at the stalwart proportions of the girl.

"Now then, as I said, I have got to git a little information from you, but if you will oblige me with it, I will give you my word I will never let on who posted me, nor bring you into the matter in any way."

"Well, sir, as long as you don't ask me any questions which will be likely to get my father in trouble I don't see why I should not answer," the girl replied.

She did not say so, but there was something about the stranger which seemed to her to require her to obey.

"Oh, I will go light on the old man!" the Westerner declared.

"I reckon from this little specimen he has given me to-day of his quality that he is a pretty bad egg, but as he is your father I do not blame you for wanting to do all you can to screen him."

"Now then, who is he and what does he do for a living?"

"His name is Pauden McGuunigal, and he lives in a little house by the river, as I said; when the river is open he is a fisherman, and in the winter he peddles clams, or fish, or whatever he can get."

"And the Italian?"

"He helps my father in the summer, carries the fish to New York by means of a sail-boat and peddles too in the winter."

"I shouldn't think the pair could make much of a living at this sort of thing!"

"My father don't do very well, but the Italian—Ginney John everybody calls him, although his name is Lorenzo Padilla—is a great gambler and wins a lot of money from his countrymen in New York."

"He does pretty well, then?"

"Oh, yes, he always seems to have plenty of money."

"Kinder strange that a feller like that should care to live in a lonely place like this hyer, and help in fishing," the Westerner observed, shrewdly.

"He came to my father when he first came to this country, and I suppose it seems like home to him," the girl explained.

"Ah! yes; and now this doctor—what of him?"

"Well, I don't know anything about him, excepting that he first came to see Ginney when he was burted."

"How was he hurt?"

"He was with a party of his countrymen in a boat on the river—one of the men was showing a revolver and it went off."

"And the Ginney was hit by the ball, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"How was it that this particular doctor came to attend him—does he live in the neighborhood?"

"No, sir, he lives in New York."

"Rather odd that a New York doctor should come out hyer!"

"Well, Ginney was acquainted with him," the girl explained. "The doctor has a sail-boat at his country place, which is on the other bank of the river, not very far from here, and Ginney used to take the doctor fishing, and so when he was burt he sent across the river for him."

"Ah, yes, and the doctor comes across in his boat, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, usually, although I have known him to come by the railroad."

"Comes to go fishing, hey?" Old Sunflower remarked, with a very peculiar look in his keen eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"By god!" muttered the big Westerner to himself, "it strikes me that, just by accident, I have got hold of the tail of the biggest kind of a rat hyer."

"Say, Miss Maggie—I reckon I heerd yer dad call you Maggie, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir, Maggie is my name."

"Did you ever hear anything 'bout the doctor's wif?"

"No, sir," replied the girl, with a surprised look. "I didn't know he was married."

"Oh, yes, he is, and that is what made the trouble between us."

Then the Westerner related how he had chanced to follow the pair, and what occurred thereby.

"He is a wretch!" Maggie declared, with honest indignation.

"But I never liked him," she continued. "And he doesn't like me either, for I overheard him tell my father once that he ought to send me away, for it was dangerous to have me around."

"I want to know!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, looking very much surprised.

"Yes, those were the very words he said!"

"Wal, now, what do you suppose the critter meant by that?"

"I don't know, and I didn't dare to ask my father about it, for he might get the idea that I was trying to spy upon him."

"Yas, and that is what them galoots yelled out about me—that I was a spy. Now, what in the name of thunder would a man want to come spying 'round hyer for, anyway?"

"I don't know except that I don't think the Ginney is any too good to go and help himself to chickens and vegetables from the folks up on the main roads at night," the girl declared. "I don't believe my father would do anything of the kind, but I know the Ginney brings things in a bag and I think he steals them."

"I reckon you have hit on the truth, and the critters were kinder skeered lest I was a detective coming to pry into the thing."

"The doctor put 'em up to that notion, you kin bet a farm!"

"And now, since I have got into this hyer thing, I reck'n I will have to go on a little mite further," Old Sunflower continued.

"The doctor has evidently carried his wife away, and as I have a curiosity 'bout the matter I intend to go down to the houses."

"The doctor went there, for he sent the galoots to bury me, thinking he had settled my hash, but I am a tough old rooster and can't be got rid of so easily, as this hyer doctor will discover, afore he and I git through with our bird's egg-ing."

CHAPTER VI.

NON EST INVENTUS.

"Oh, sir, but will you not be apt to get in trouble if you go where my father and the Ginney is?" the girl asked in alarm.

"I reckon not!" Old Sunflower replied with a good-natured smile. "After the taste which those two galoots had of my quality I don't believe there is much danger of their wanting to sample me ag'in."

"I know that my father is a coward at heart, for, notwithstanding his size, if a small man makes a good bluff at him he always backs down, but the Ginney has the reputation of being a dangerous man," the girl warned.

"He looks like it," the Westerner assented. "Thar's no two ways 'bout that! He has the appearance of one of them kind of fellows who had jest as lief jab a knife into a man as not."

"Yes, they say that he always uses a knife when he gets into trouble."

"I reckon the say-so is correct," the old Westerner observed. "He looks like a regular snaky cuss, but with my little pop-guns—I've got a second one, own brother to the first that I used to make these galoots skip the gutter—I ain't afraid of a regiment of Ginneys!"

"So I am going down to see what this hyer little settlement by the river looks like."

"It is my private opinion, though, Miss Maggie, that I will not find any one there," Old Sunflower continued.

"I would give a trifle to be able to say a few words to that durned Frenchman, but I am willing to bet all the rocks that I have got, or ever expect to get in this hyer world, that when these two galoots come skipping down the road and reported that the cold corpus they came to bury was able to sit up and go a-gunning for rascals, the frog eater came to the conclusion that the

hull gang had to git a move on them and clear out in double-quick time."

"Perhaps so, but they may not think you will dare to come, single-handed, and face three of them," the girl remarked.

"Thar was a wise man once who wrote something 'bout conscience making cowards of us all," Old Sunflower replied. "And in this hyer case it is big odds that when the Frenchman hears I am alive, and have got the tools of war with me, his first thought will be that I will come arter him, and he will skip out as soon as the Lord will let him, and do you s'pose if he cuts and runs that your father and the Ginney are going to stay to face me? Not much?"

"I think you are right, for you have already given them a great fright."

"Mebbe I ain't correct, but I am going to try the rifle, anyway!" Old Sunflower declared, rising to his feet, drawing his revolver and putting in fresh cartridges in place of the discharged ones.

"I have taken an interest in this unfortunate wife of the Frenchman's, and I am going to try for to help her a bit, for, to my mind, it is as sart'in as eggs is eggs that if somebody don't interfere, that poor critter will be worried clean out of this hyer world!"

"He is a horrible wretch!" the girl declared, in great heat.

"Right you ar'!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"You never said a truer word in all your life! But I will fix the scamp before I get through with him!"

"Say! an idee has come to me!" the big Westerner declared, abruptly.

"S'pose you skip on ahead, and if any of the party ar' thar, gi'n 'em warning that I am coming, and am on the war-path, too!"

"Say you left me fixing my revolvers, and I said I was coming down to the river to clean out the hull durned boode on 'em!"

"That will kinder let you out, if they ar' feeling r'iled 'bout you helping me."

"Very well, I will go at once," the girl remarked, picking up her bundle of groceries, which she had placed on a stone.

"Don't make no bones of telling 'em that I am hot for war, and am coming down to gi'n 'em the toughest kind of a scrap!" the big Westerner declared.

The girl nodded and hastened away.

Old Sunflower watched her until she vanished amid the bushes, then he sat on the stone to reflect a bit.

"She may find the galoots thar, but I doubt it," he soliloquized.

"If they ar' thar, and have a notion of coming up to the rock and making a bold fight, like a lot of little men, their game will be to lay in wait for me on the road, so as to get a crack at me without giving the old man any chance for his white alley!"

"I must put a spoke in that 'ar wheel, instanter!" he cried, in conclusion.

The scheme he had devised was a simple one.

He would go down the road until he came in sight of the houses, then conceal himself, and if the three came forth with the intention of ambushing him, he would make his appearance and so defeat the plan.

Old Sunflower followed in the footsteps of the girl.

Ten minutes' walk brought him to the end of the woodland, then the land began an abrupt descent, and down in the level strip which ran along the bank of the river were the three houses of which the girl had spoken.

It was only about five hundred yards from the edge of the hill to the settlement, and Maggie McGunnigal was within fifty feet of the nearest house when Old Sunflower peered from amid the bushes.

Not a soul was within sight, nor was there any indication of the men being in the neighborhood.

"I reckon my idee was right that the hull gang would clean out as soon as the Frenchman made the discovery that I was the liveliest kind of a corpse," the big Westerner remarked, as he watched the girl enter the house.

The buildings were small ones, only a story and a half high, poorly constructed, innocent of paint, and, apparently, divided into a couple of rooms on the main floor and a garret overhead.

In a few moments the girl came out of the first house and entered the other.

"She ain't struck anybody yet!" Old Sunflower soliloquized. "It is an elephant to a monkey that the hull darned gang has slipped!"

"The Frenchman ain't the kind of a galoot to make a good squar', open fight," he continued. "If he can't go inter the thing with all the advantages on his side, he will be mighty apt to keep out."

The girl now made her reappearance from the second house and looked around her in an irresolute manner.

"It is jest as I expected," the Westerner declared. "She can't find anybody; the gang has vamosed the ranch, and I might as well put in an appearance."

As he spoke, he came out of the bushes and began the descent of the hill.

"There isn't any one here—they are all gone!"

the girl exclaimed, as Old Sunflower came up to her.

"Wal, I reckoned it would be that way," he responded, with a chuckle. "All on 'em have got all they want of your uncle."

"But, I say: whar do you s'pose they have gone?"

"I don't know," the girl responded, with a perplexed shake of the head.

"There is a path up the river and another one down; they are both pretty rough roads, but a man on foot can go easily enough, and then there's the river—one of the boats is gone, too," she added, with a glance at the beach.

"A sail-boat?"

"Yes."

"That is the way the Frenchman has got off, I reckon," Old Sunflower remarked, musingly.

"The woman ain't in a very good condition to travel, for she is sick and weak, so he would hardly be apt to try to lug her over the rocks; but by water, with the aid of a sail-boat, escape would be easy."

"Would you know the boat, do you think, if you saw her?" Old Sunflower asked, abruptly, noticing that the girl was gazing intently out on the river.

"Yes, I think so, although I am liable to make a mistake, for there are plenty of small boats which look almost exactly alike at a distance," Maggie replied.

"Do you see any one that looks like her?"

"Yes; that little boat on the New York side."

And the girl pointed to a craft about a mile down the river.

"She is running right afore the wind, ain't she?" the Westerner remarked.

"Yes; and the tide is with her, too, and that helps her along."

"Wal, if the Frenchman is in that boat, and I reckon he is, thar ain't any chance for me to catch him," Old Sunflower observed.

"All I kin do is to git back to New York as soon as possible."

"The quickest way will be for you to let me row you across, and then you can take a train on the other shore," Maggie suggested.

"Sho! wal, ar' you a champion oarsman, I want to know?"

The girl laughed, and colored up a little.

"Well, I don't know as I can lay claim to being anything of that kind, but I can handle an oar as well as most of the men who live along the river," she replied.

"You see, I have lived here all my life, and have been used to a boat ever since I was a little bit of a girl," she explained.

"Wal, if it isn't putting you to too much trouble, I will be glad to accept your offer."

"Oh, no trouble at all!" the girl declared. "It is mere play for me to row across the river when it is as still and calm as it is to-day."

"I am ever so much obliged to you, and I will do as much for you some time if the opportunity ever comes in my way."

"Oh, that is all right, sir; I am glad to be able to oblige you."

Then she led the way to the beach where a light skiff was drawn up on the shore.

With the assistance of the Westerner the boat was shoved into the water, and the two got on board.

Maggie had not made an idle boast when she declared she could handle the oars, and as she was not only skillful in the use of the white-ash blades, but possessed of uncommon strength, she drove the light boat through the water with all the ease of an old salt.

Old Sunflower watched the girl for awhile with admiring eyes, and then said:

"I don't know, Miss Maggie, but what you have got yourself into considerable trouble by trying to take my part."

"I am not worrying about that, sir," the girl replied, spiritedly. "I only did what was right, and I would do the same again under like circumstances."

"This Frenchman is a p'ison serpent, and he may make mischief for you, even if you can hold your own with your father and the Italian."

"Oh, there is no doubt about my being able to do that!" the girl replied in the most confident manner.

"I can take either one of them by the scruff of the neck and break them in two across my knee, and if I once get my temper up, I don't doubt I could lay them both out together."

"You must look out for the Frenchman!" Old Sunflower warned. "He is the dangerous one. Don't let on that you know I had trouble with him; pretend to think you don't know how I got my wound, and if you ever get in trouble, just drop a line or send a message, to Old Sunflower, care of Police Headquarters, New York. The chief is a friend of mine, and he will see that I get the summons all right."

"Are you a detective?" the girl asked, suspiciously.

"A detective, ho, ho! a lively kind of a detective an old Western rustler like I am would make, but the chief is an old pard of mine, and he'll do a heap for me!"

Soon the boat touched the New York shore; Old Sunflower landed, shook hands, warmly, with the girl and then departed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET WAY.

OLD SUNFLOWER thought he had solved the puzzle of the Frenchman's disappearance with the woman, but his shrewdness was at fault.

It was the Italian who had sailed down the river in the boat, and the Frenchman, in company with the old Irishman, was concealed in a thick clump of evergreens, which grew on the hillside, an eighth of a mile above the house. From this hiding-place they had witnessed the advent of the girl, then Old Sunflower's appearance, and watched them go across the river.

"The escape of that man from death is really miraculous," the Frenchman observed. "I would not be willing to believe he could be living if my own eyes did not bear witness to the sight."

"Begorra! he doesn't look much like a dead man!" the Irishman declared.

"It is evident that my bullet only stunned him, but when he went down I thought he was stone dead," the Frenchman remarked.

"Where has the girl been?" he asked, abruptly.

"To the store afther some groceries."

"And in returning she took the short cut by the old quarry?"

"Yis, of coarse, that saves a d'ale."

"That accounts for her being with the man, and it was a bad break for you and Ginney to attempt to attack him when you discovered that he wasn't dead, particularly when your girl was present," the Frenchman declared.

"Faix! we were so taken by surprise that we didn't know what to do," the old Irishman explained.

"You said yer had been follerred by a perlice spy, and you had laid the blaggard out wid a bullet in the head, and, of coarse, when the Ginney and meself found you had made a bungle of the job we wint in to finish him."

"It would have been all right if your daughter hadn't been there, but her presence made it all wrong," the Frenchman remarked.

"Think what a bad thing it would be for us if her suspicions were excited that everything is not as it ought to be."

"Yis, be the powers! it would be ugly!" the old Irishman declared.

"At present I don't think she has any suspicion, do you?" the other asked.

"Not a bit! I'm shure of it!"

"But, notwithstanding that fact, it would be a great deal better for all of us if she was not here, as I have often told you."

"Oh, musha! I don't want to be afther sending the gurl away!" the father protested.

"It would be the wisest course, though."

"Phat do yeas think this spalpeen of a spy is afther?" McGunnigal asked.

"I don't know, but I do not believe the man has really anything to go upon. I should not have shot him, only that after I caught him playing the spy on me we got into a quarrel, and I plugged him to avoid being shot myself," the Frenchman explained, thus artfully concealing the facts of the case.

"Yis, I see."

"I think he is only mousing around on a sort of a fishing excursion to discover what he can find out."

"He will not be afther finding anything!" the old Irishman declared. "We hide everything away too carefully."

"You will have to get up some story to account to Maggie for the way you and the Ginney acted toward the man," the Frenchman remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"Yis, fur the gurl didn't know what to make of it when we made a rush at him."

"I have thought of a way to get out of the scrape. It will be necessary to explain the attack in some reasonable manner, for if the girl gets the idea into her head that there is something wrong, it will be apt to set her to watch us, and then she may succeed in discovering some of our games."

"Faix! that would be ugly now, wouldn't it?" the old Irishman exclaimed, with a dubious shake of his head.

"Yes, and we must try to prevent the possibility of such an occurrence. The best way of getting out of the difficulty is to tell the girl that you were not in earnest; you pretended to be going to kill the man in order to give him such a scare that he would not be apt to come spying in this quarter again."

"Yis, I see; and that is an illgant explanation!"

"Oh, yes, it will answer. You can pretend that you thought he had been employed by the fish warden to find out if you were not fishing with illegal nets. That will be a good excuse."

"True for yeas! Oh, she will swallow that all right!" the Irishman declared, in a confident way.

"Yes; the explanation will probably satisfy her, but these women are always making trouble," the Frenchman asserted.

"There is my wife, for instance; she is getting so now that I can't do anything with her."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; some years ago I expected the day would come when I would be able to make her

extremely useful, but I see now the expectation will never be realized, and, although I have succeeded in getting complete control of her, yet it has been at the expense of her nerves and courage, and now, even if I could get her to consent to aid me, she is in such a condition that she would not be able to be of any service."

"That is bad."

"It is, indeed! and another danger confronts me. In order to secure her assistance, I have allowed her to become acquainted with the particulars of some of my schemes; it was not wise for me to do so, but I felt so sure I could succeed in bending her to my will, that I became careless. Men will make such mistakes, you know, even the most crafty schemers, and I am afraid there is danger she may betray me."

"Oh, musha!" the Irishman exclaimed, in alarm, "that would be mighty bad for all of us!"

"Yes, you are right it would. At times she is not quite right in her mind," he explained. "Ever since we first met, I have been able to exercise a wonderful influence over her, for she is a fickle, weak-minded thing, but the result of my subjecting her will to mine has been to weaken her mind."

"I had an idea of placing her in an asylum, a private institution, where the people attended strictly to their own business, as long as the patient's bills are promptly paid."

"Yis, I understand; and, if she was afther telling ugly stories, no wan would pay any attention to them," the Irishman remarked, with a knowing nod.

"Exactly; but, when I came to tell her what I proposed to do, she recoiled in horror and declared that death was preferable."

"There's no sinse to that! While there is life there is hope, do ye moind?"

"Yes; but she is so utterly broken down that she doesn't look at it in that way," the Frenchman replied.

"She implored me to give her some drug which would dispatch her quickly to the other world, saying she would gladly take it."

"That would be afther putting you out of all danger of being betrayed by her," the Irishman observed, shrewdly.

"Yes, it is a happy way out of the difficulty. She has ceased to be useful to me—in fact, at present, she is most decidedly in my way."

"Faix! if I was you I would be afther getting rid of her quick enough, and you could do it aisly wid your knowledge," the old Irishman declared, significantly.

"Well, I am not particularly squeamish, but I have an idea that it is not good luck for me to raise my hand against a woman, and so I hesitate to remove her, but if she is willing to take the drug herself, if I will get it for her, that is another matter."

"The Ginney would be afther wringing her neck for yees for tin dollars!" McGunnigal declared.

"What is the use of employing him when she is willing to do the job herself?"

"That's true! But if she won't, the Ginney'll do it for yees."

"I have sent him to the city after the drug, and when he returns—he will not get back until after dark—the deed will be done."

"How will yees be afther disposing of the body?"

"Wait until the tide is on the ebb, then tow it out into the river and let it go; the chances are great that in the darkness it will not be picked up until it gets down into the bay; no one then will be able to tell where it comes from, and when it is recovered the supposition will be that she committed suicide."

"I shall take precious good care not to identify it, and the probabilities are that no one else will."

"It is a foine way out of the scrape!"

"But you will have to get rid of your daughter for the time being; it will not be safe to have her around, you know."

"That is aisly to do; me sister-in-law, her aunt, who lives on the road just above the village, is after wanting Maggie to come and see her for a while."

"You can send her to-night and let her stay for a week or so."

"Yis, I will."

"Get rid of her as soon as she returns and I will stay up here until she is gone," the Frenchman remarked. "It is just as well she should not be aware that I am in the neighborhood."

"All right!"

By this time the girl was returning, and McGunnigal descended to meet her.

When she landed, the old Irishman asked, anxiously, if the spy had said anything about having him arrested for using illegal nets, and explained why he and the Ginney had attacked the man.

Maggie assured her father that not a word had been said, nor any discoveries made. Then the Irishman pretended to suddenly remember the invitation which had been extended to the girl.

Maggie was glad enough to go. So, in a few minutes she prepared her bundle, and departed.

After she was well out of the way the Frenchman descended to the house.

Just as the shades of evening closed in upon the earth the Italian returned in the sail-boat, and delivered to the doctor the vial containing the drug for which he had been sent.

"Now then we will bring this matter to a speedy conclusion!" the Frenchman declared.

The three were in the living-room of the Irishman's house. There were two apartments on the first floor. One used as a kitchen and living-room; the other the old Irishman slept in, while his daughter occupied the garret.

To all outward appearances there was no cellar under the house, but when the Frenchman made a sign to his companions they moved the table which stood against the wall.

Then the doctor pressed an innocent-looking nail-head, which projected slightly from the wood-work, the lever of a secret spring evidently, for a small section of the wainscot swung open, revealing a passageway about three feet square.

From the opening a rude flight of steps led downward into the cellar which existed under the house.

The Frenchman descended.

When he was half-way down, his head about on a level with the floor, a sudden thought came to him.

"Ginney, you had best go outside and keep watch!" he declared. "I do not think there is much danger of any spy lurking in the neighborhood, but it is always well to be on the safe side."

"This is a ticklish piece of business, and if we were caught we would have hard work to get out of the scrape."

"There must be no witnesses to this night's dark work!" he added.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SURPRISE.

"YOU'RE right!" McGunnigal declared. "We would be very foolish to be afther taking any chances."

"Maka all safra!" the Italian exclaimed. "Me go looka—finda a spy—put ze knife in him so quick he neva know whata killa him!"

And then the Italian glided out into the darkness.

The Frenchman descended into the cellar, while the Irishman held the lamp so the light would shine into the darkness below.

The underground apartment was an ordinary one, and if any inquisitive soul had discovered the secret spring, and so gained admittance to the cellar, his wonder would have been excited as to why so much trouble had been taken to conceal the fact of the cellar's existence, for all there was in the apartment were a lot of old barrels and other useless rubbish.

When he got to the foot of the stairs the Frenchman proceeded in a straight line to the wall, which was apparently of solid stone, pressed his hand upon a certain spot and a door opened.

The woodwork of the door was covered with cement, stained to resemble the rest of the wall.

Beyond the door was another cellar, fully as large as the first, which contained a table, upon which a candle burned, some chairs, a small printing-press, and other machinery which seemed to appertain to a metal-working establishment.

There was also a fireplace in which sat a good-sized furnace.

The moment though that the Frenchman got a view of the apartment through the doorway he uttered a cry of alarm.

"Phat is the matter that yees let a howl like that out of yees!" the old Irishman cried.

"Matter enough—my wife is gone!" the doctor replied.

"Oh, murdher!" cried McGunnigal, hurrying down the steps.

"It is true, for there is no place here where she could conceal herself."

This was apparent at a glance.

"She must have found her way out through the shed," the Frenchman continued. "She could reach the trap-door easily enough by getting on the table."

Then he rushed into the inner cellar, closely followed by the old Irishman, leaped upon the table, and pressed upon a trap-door which was in the ceiling directly over him.

It rose under his hands, the cellar was barely six feet high in the clear, and any one by using the table could easily get out through the trap-door, which led into a little shed, one end of which was used as a chicken-house.

"She has given me the slip!" the doctor cried in a great rage. "I would not have believed her to be capable of doing such a thing!" he added.

"Faix! there is no trustin' these wimen!" the old Irishman declared, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"They are afther being a divilish lot of sly cats," he continued.

"She had not recovered from her swoon when I placed her here, and she seemed so weak and utterly dispirited that I did not dream there was any danger of her attempting to escape, and so I never took the trouble to ascertain whether this trap was fastened or not."

"These wimen are a lot of desateful b'astes!" McGunnigal cried with the air of a sage.

"Perhaps it is not too late to overtake her, for she cannot be very far off!" the Frenchman declared.

"She could not have got out until after dark, for I have been on the watch from my covert on the hillside, and I should have surely seen her if she had escaped while the daylight lasted."

"True for yees!"

"Go back to the house and get the lantern; warn the Ginney, and we will see if we cannot trace her!" the Frenchman commanded.

Then he climbed through the trap to the shed, closing the door after him, while McGunnigal hurried back through the cellars to the house.

The Frenchman came out of the shed and peered anxiously around him.

The night was a light one, although there was no moon, and so the man was able to see what he was about.

He was near enough to the shore to distinguish the black and shapeless forms which represented the boats on the beach.

An idea suddenly came to him.

"It is a hundred to one that she has taken a boat!" he cried.

The sound of his voice reached the Italian and he came hurrying up.

"The mischief is to pay!" the Frenchman declared.

"Eh? whata da matter?"

"The woman is gone!"

"Diarolo! dat is a badda piece of work! We must runna fast after her!"

"Yes, but I am afraid she has taken a boat!"

At this moment McGunnigal came from the house with the lantern.

The Frenchman hailed the old Irishman, told of his suspicions, and the three hurried to the beach.

There the doctor's fears were confirmed, for one of the boats was missing.

It was the one which Maggie had used.

"There was a pair of oars in it too—curses upon the luck!" the doctor cried, exasperated by this piece of ill-fortune.

"Yis, I noticed that Maggie was afther havin' them in the boat, and I had it in me mind to take them out, but I didn't, worse luck!" the old Irishman remarked, with a doleful shake of the head.

"Taka sail-boat—finda her maybe!" the Italian suggested.

"Is she afther knowing how to handle an oar, do ye think?" McGunnigal asked.

"No, I do not believe she ever had an oar in her hand in her life," the Frenchman answered.

"It is a foine time thin she will have trying to row ag'in' the current, and kape out of the way of the tugs and st'amerers, that are afther paying no more attition to a row-boat than if it was a log of wood," the old Irishman remarked.

"That is true, and it does not seem possible she will be able to make much progress, for besides not knowing anything about handling oars, she is physically so weak that even if she possessed the knowledge she would not be able to do much in that line, for her strength would soon give out," the Frenchman observed.

"If she was afther being run down by a st'amer and sint to the bottom it would be a good thing for yees," McGunnigal observed, shrewdly.

"Yes, that is true enough," the doctor replied.

"Such an accident would certainly save me a deal of trouble, and I hope that fortune will favor me enough to have the affair turn out in that way, but I am afraid it is too much to expect so good a piece of luck."

"It is jist about the time whin the st'amerers are all afther coming up the river, and I think there's a foine chance for her being run down!" the old Irishman declared.

"It is hard work for a good oarsman to k'ape out of the way of the murthering blaggards sometimes whin the wind and tide is ag'in' him," McGunnigal continued.

"Well, I think myself there is considerable doubt about her getting across to the other shore in safety, but I would like to know something certain about the matter," the Frenchman remarked.

"We might be afther taking the sail-boat for to see," the old Irishman suggested. "It will not be too much trouble, and it will be some satisfaction for to make the try, even if we don't find out anything."

"That is true, so let us get aboard as soon as we can," the Frenchman responded.

The three hurried to the boat, and were soon off from the shore.

"The tide is flood now, and as the wind is nor'west, we can be afther beating up the river widout trouble," McGunnigal observed, after the boat was under way.

"This movement on her part is to me a most incomprehensible thing," the doctor observed. "I have got her in such a state by the administration to her of subtle drugs, which bad the effect of undermining her health, and exercising over her my will power that I did not believe she was capable of summoning up resolution enough to take a step of this sort."

"It is jist as I was afther tellin' yeas—of all

the desateful b'astes in this world wimmen are the worst!" the old Irishman affirmed.

"The only explanation which occurs to me in regard to this affair is that she was suddenly seized with a fit of insanity after she recovered from her swoon," the Frenchman observed.

"The cunning of the insane is proverbial," he continued.

"When she recovered consciousness her head was affected, but she knew enough to understand that she was a prisoner, and it is natural enough to suppose she had sense sufficient for her to arrive at the conclusion she was confined in the mad-house to which I told her she was to be taken."

"Ah, yis, and whin she got her mind in that way nothing would be affer answerin but to give leg bail as soon as she could," McGunnigal remarked.

"I have no doubt I have hit on the truth," the doctor declared.

"The crazy fit came on, and then she never rested until she managed to escape."

They had made a short "tack" over toward the New York shore, without the searchers discovering any trace of the boat, so they "came about" and headed for the Jersey side again, and when they were past the middle of the river they were about half a mile above the point from which they had started.

"Look sharp!" warned the Italian, who was on the lookout on the bow of the boat.

The Ginney had sharp eyes, and was popularly supposed to possess the catlike power of seeing in the dark.

"Do you see anything?" the Frenchman exclaimed.

"Me thinka so!"

And then the two in the stern anxiously peered through the gloom.

"Whereabouts?" asked McGunnigal.

"Right ahead—keepa as you are!"

Another minute passed, all three straining their eyes in endeavoring to pierce the darkness.

"It is da boat—she upset!" the Italian announced.

And now the two in the stern could distinguish the object floating at the mercy of the waves.

It was a boat, upside down, as the Ginney declared.

"Belad! it looks like mine!" McGunnigal exclaimed.

The Irishman ran alongside of the boat and put his craft up into the wind so an examination could be made.

It was indeed the missing boat, and one of her sides was stove in, thus plainly indicating that she had been run down by a steamer.

"You see, it was as I was affer tellin' ye's!" the old Irishman affirmed. "I didn't think she would have the luck to git across widout being run down by some blagg'ard!"

"It's all right—I am satisfied!" the Frenchman remarked. "I am saved the trouble of getting her out of the way, and now the field is clear for me to enter into a scheme which promises to net me a fortune!"

CHAPTER IX.

A CELEBRATED CASE.

AFTER reaching the shore, Old Sunflower proceeded to the railroad station, which was about a quarter of a mile down the track.

On the way he meditated in regard to the situation.

"It's the will of Providence, evidently, that I sha'n't cut my stick for the West yet awhile," the Westerner murmured.

"There is work for me to do in the East, and I must stay hyer and attend to it."

"That 'ar Frenchman is the worst kind of a bad egg. In fact, I reckon he is about as deep a schemer as I ever run up ag'in', and that is saying a good deal, too, for I have come across some extra-big devils in my time."

"His being so anxious to git his wife out of the way satisfied me that he has some game on foot with which her presence interferes."

"But I am thrown off the track now, and jest 'ow to git on ag'in is a puzzle," and Old Sunflower shook his head slowly as he reflected upon this difficult question.

"It will not do for me to expect to git arter the man ag'in by hanging round the old house over opposite, for if I should try that game, my trick would be smoked immediately."

"That place is the headquarters of a gang, I think, and it is so situated that it is not possible for a spy to shadow the crooks without discovery."

"I reckon I had better call upon my friend, the chief of police, and see if he knows anything 'bout this hyer Frenchman."

"The galoot is sich a peculiar-looking feller that I reckon I kin describe him so any bloodhound who had ever met the man wouldn't have any trouble in recognizing the critter."

Luck favored Old Sunflower, for in a few minutes after he arrived at the station a train came along, and, an hour later, he was closeted with the superintendent of the New York police.

The chief was surprised to see his visitor, for

he expected by this time that he was well on his way to his Western ranch.

Due attention the official gave to Old Sunflower's recital.

"It strikes me that you have made an important discovery," the chief remarked. "From your description I recognize the man. His name is Bernard Montlac and his office used to be located in the French quarter, on the west side of town. He bears the reputation of being a skillful physician, and once had a good practice among his countrymen."

"About five years ago, though, he got into a little trouble which hurt his reputation very much, and deprived him of a good many patients," the superintendent continued.

"There was a rich old Frenchman with a young wife; he was taken ill; this Doctor Montlac was called in, but after a week's sickness the old man died, and when his will was read it was found he had left all his property to his wife."

"Wal, thar wasn't anything strange 'bout that."

"No, old men with young wives will do that sort of thing, but as the old fellow had a host of relatives, all of whom expected some money from the old gentleman, there was a terrible row kicked up, for a round dozen of them, who had been interested with the old fellow in his business, protested that he had told them they would be remembered when he came to make his will."

"Ah, yes, I see! Well, it wasn't any wonder they were disgusted."

"Another strange fact was that the old man—his name was Grandville, by the way—Victor Grandville—did not leave half as much money as everybody expected."

"That is a very common disappointment," Old Sunflower observed. "The amount of rich man's wealth is almost always exaggerated. Men who are popularly supposed to be millionaires sometimes don't leave enough to pay their debts."

"Yes, I am aware of that fact, but in this case, there wasn't any supposition about the matter at all!" the superintendent remarked.

"Grandville was in the wholesale wine business, his main house here in New York, with a branch in Chicago, and just before he was taken sick, while on a business trip to the West, he sold out the Chicago house for fifty thousand dollars, which he received in the shape of United States bonds. To this fact there were three witnesses, the man who bought the business, his brother, and the manager of the branch house."

"That was certainly ample proof that he got the bonds all right."

"Yes, but when he died a week later in New York the bonds did not come to light, nor was there any mention of them in his will, which was executed three days before he died, and, understand, there wasn't any fifty thousand dollars in the estate conveyed by the will to represent these bonds; so the explanation that he had sold them, or had the cash, or had invested it in another way, wouldn't fit."

"Exactly, I comprehend—the leetle fifty thousand had disappeared."

"Precisely! the estate amounted to about sixty thousand, so you can say that almost one-half of all the old man was known to be worth had most mysteriously disappeared."

"A very strange case."

"Another odd circumstance about this affair, too, was that the will was not produced until a week after the old man was cremated."

"Cremated, hey?" Old Sunflower observed, in an extremely significant way.

"Yes, it was a hobby, of the old man, who was a freethinker of the most radical stamp, so at the time it was not thought to be anything out of the way, but afterwards, when certain circumstances came to light, the cremation business gave rise to a deal of suspicion that there had been foul play."

"But, as, the body had been cremated, that wasn't any possibility of an examination being made so as to prove, or disprove, the charge."

"Yes, and then the keeping back of the will was a mysterious thing. No one knew where it was, although the witnesses to the paper declared the old man had made a will before he died, although they were ignorant of the contents of the paper to which they had affixed their signatures, only knowing that the old man had told them it was his will."

"The wife declared that she did not know what had become of it; her husband had merely told her he had made a will, and she would find he had not forgotten her."

"Then it was suddenly discovered among a lot of books on a shelf in a room where Grandville breathed his last."

"And this was regarded as a very suspicious circumstance, of course."

"Yes, the inference was that the will had been purposely kept back until the body was cremated, and the parties who had thus arranged the matter, had done so because they knew there would be trouble as soon as the contents of the will became known."

"There was a precious row kicked up, of course?"

"Oh, yes, in the first place the estate had dwindled to one-half, in the second, the wife got all, and the relatives nothing."

"Aha! it takes the cash to bring out the fighting qualities of the human beast!" Old Sunflower observed with a dry chuckle.

"The will was declared to be a forgery, and some of the disappointed ones went so far as to affirm there had been foul play."

"Grandville had been poisoned by the doctor, at the instigation of the wife, and for his services had received the fifty thousand dollars in bonds."

"Pretty big pay for the work, although poisoning is mighty ticklish business, and a man ought to git a good price for risking his neck."

"And it was on account of this belief that there had been foul play that I came to know all about the business," the chief explained.

"Some of the relatives came to you to cast a little light on the affair, hey?"

"Yes, and when I listened to the story I thought at first there might be something in it."

"Going on the principle that whar thar was so much smoke thar ought to be some fire?" Old Sunflower suggested with one of his broad grins.

"Yes, and as it seemed to be an extremely complicated case I took hold of the matter myself, besides putting some of my best men on it."

"I'm a-follerin you with a deal of interest," Old Sunflower affirmed.

"As soon as I got possession of the facts of the case I immediately comprehended that, as far as the murder suspicion went, there was not one chance in a thousand for all the detectives of the world combined to do anything."

"I examined the record of this Doctor Montlac in the closest manner, and found that though he had been mixed up in a few unsavory cases, no proof sufficiently strong had been collected to warrant his appearance in a court to answer a criminal charge."

"He had been the family doctor of the Grandvilles for a year or so, and though I discovered there had been some gossip in regard to a flirtation between himself and the wife, yet, when I came to look into it I found it did not amount to anything, nor with all my researches could I discover proof enough of foul play to justify me in placing anybody under arrest."

"The cremation of the body rendered it impossible to prove whether the man was poisoned or not," Old Sunflower suggested, shrewdly.

"Yes, and then on the will question the dissatisfied heirs did not stand a ghost of a show."

"There was a fight, and they were beaten. Their idea was that the original will had been stolen and a false one put in its place; the witnesses were two ignorant servants, and they could be easily bought to swear to a falsehood; it was the theory of attack that the paper was a forged document, and the servants had affixed their signatures after the old man's death, and not before."

"That 'ar is a pretty far-fetched idee!" the big Westerner declared.

"Yes, the court took that view of it—in fact, it was the only way a sensible man could think in regard to the matter," the superintendent declared.

"The will was all right; Grandville, like many another old man with a young and pretty wife, changed his mind about remembering his relatives in his will, and came to the conclusion she was entitled to all his money.

"I don't doubt that the wife did her best to bring him to that way of thinking, but that is all right—there is no law against that, you know."

"Oh, no! If there was, the jails wouldn't be half big enough to hold the women!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, jocosely.

"And during the whole affair there was not a single thing brought to light which went to show what had become of the fifty thousand dollars worth of bonds."

"Say, this is a reg'lar celebreated case!"

"Yes, you are right, and if you can make anything out of it you will perform a task which baffled all the best detectives in the city, myself included!" the chief declared.

"How long ago was this?"

"Five years!"

"The doctor still practicing, hey?"

"I think so, but I have not kept a close watch on him since the case ended. I chanced to meet one of the heirs one day, though, and he told me the doctor had married Grandville's widow."

"Oho! that makes it look like a game!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW NEW YORK THUG.

"YES, but it isn't safe to go on that theory, you know," the superintendent observed. "Because the two happened to get married, it doesn't go to show that there was any guilty compact between 'em."

"Very true, but as human nature is, it is safe betting that about nine out of every ten people would be pretty certain to jump to the con-

clusion that there was an understanding between the two," Old Sunflower urged, shrewdly.

"I agree with you there, and I do not mind admitting that I do not wonder such an impression should exist," the superintendent remarked, reflectively.

"Of course, old fellow, as you are one of the guild, a past master in the grand art of man-hunting, you fully understand that the old, experienced bloodhound finally acquires a sort of instinct which leads him to jump to a conclusion not warranted by any evidence which he may be able to obtain."

"Yes, a sort of power to smell out the game, so to speak," the big Westerner remarked.

"Exactly; now, while I would not like to make so broad a claim as being always able to jump to a correct conclusion, when I cannot secure direct evidence, yet, once in a while I do come across a case where my professional instinct tells me certain parties are guilty, notwithstanding the fact that I am not able to get a bit of proof against them."

"I understand all about that peculiar feeling, too," Old Sunflower remarked.

"It was that thief-taking instinct which led me to set this Frenchman down as a thorough-paced rascal before I had heard him speak ten words in the railway car."

"Precisely! Well, after I got all the facts of the case together I sat down one evening, with a good cigar between my teeth, and endeavored to read the riddle, and this was the conclusion to which I came," the superintendent remarked.

"First, there had been foul play; the old Frenchman was poisoned, and the doctor was the man who had done the deed, but as to whether the wife was a party to the crime or not was a point which bothered me for some time; finally, though, after reflecting over what I had learned regarding her character, and weighing the impression which she had made upon me—I took pains to have a long interview with her, pretending to be a lawyer interested in the will question—I came to the conclusion that she was not a confederate, but a dupe."

"I reckon you are right!" Old Sunflower declared. "What I overheard of the conversation between the two in the car leads me to that conclusion."

"Yes, I saw that she was a weak, fickle-minded woman, one of the kind easily influenced by a stronger mind for either good or evil, but not the sort of creature at all to stain her hands in blood."

"She lacked the nerve to commit so great a crime as murder, or even to conspire at bloodshed, and I could plainly see too that this Doctor Montlac had contrived to secure a great influence over her."

"Yes; he is a wily, smooth-spoken customer, one of the fellers with a tongue which can wheedle Old Satan himself!" the big Westerner declared.

"I ciphered the matter out in this way," the superintendent remarked.

"The will was all right—a genuine document, and as soon as the old man executed it, the Frenchman, in his capacity of doctor, gave him some drug which forced him to make a hasty exit from this world of toil and trouble."

"The will was concealed so that not by any possibility could its contents become known until the old man's body was cremated."

"The Frenchman knew there would be a row the moment the will was made public; he anticipated the cry of foul play would be raised, and, if the body of the dead man was so it could be got at, a medical examination would take place and his crime be discovered."

"He is a deep feller! No mistake 'bout that!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "One of the kind that is in the habit of looking 'way ahead!"

"After he had the body safely disposed of, he allowed the will to come to light," the superintendent continued. "He felt that his position was an impregnable one, and the heirs might kick up all the row they pleased, for they would only have their labor for their pains."

"Yes, a crime of this kind is mighty hard to bring home to a man if the body is got out of the way so the doctors can't get at it."

"It is almost impossible to get proof sufficient for a conviction without the evidence of the doctors showing that the party died from poison," the superintendent declared.

"The doer of such a deed seldom has any accomplices. The crime is done in secret, and there are no witnesses. Now, in this case, though I felt morally certain that the doctor had poisoned the old Frenchman, knowing he had made a will in favor of his wife, going on the idea that after awhile he could induce the woman to marry him, yet, as I could not secure a single bit of proof to back up my belief, I could not take any action."

"How about the fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds?" the big Westerner inquired. "Did you cipher that out?"

The chief of police shook his head.

"Too much for you, eh?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, with a grin.

"Yes, I will have to admit that. I have not the remotest idea of what became of the bonds."

"It is mighty odd that the old man didn't

mention them in his will," the Westerner remarked, thoughtfully.

"Did he specify the rest of his property, or merely lump the bulk thing in, saying, all I have I give to my wife?"

"Oh, no; the document was very carefully drawn, clear and distinct, and everything particularly mentioned," the chief replied.

"It was the general remark of the lawyers engaged in the case that, if all wills were as carefully and clearly drawn as the old Grandville's, there would be few documents of the kind broken by grasping and dissatisfied heirs."

"Suppose you took the precaution of keeping a watch on the Frenchman for some time, just to see how he would carry sail?" Old Sunflower remarked, in his shrewd way.

"Yes, I had him quietly shadowed, not that I really expected to discover anything which would help me to put the collar on the man, for I was satisfied that if he was the guilty party, he had no accomplices, and was by far too cunning a rascal to be apt to make any great mistake, which would give me a chance at him."

"Under the circumstances, you know, as long as he kept his mouth shut, and did not confess to any one that he had poisoned the old man, it would be impossible to get a hold on him."

"In a case of this kind, if it can be proved that the suspected party had purchased poison, it aids the prosecution materially; but where a doctor is concerned, it is almost impossible to make anything going on this line, for in the course of his business he has plenty of opportunity to procure deadly drugs without exciting question or remark."

"That is certainly true," Old Sunflower coincided. "When a doctor goes in for rascality in that direction, it is an awful hard matter to nail him."

"You understand that I did not put shadows on the Frenchman's track with instructions to follow him day and night, or even to keep a constant daily watch on him."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend," the Westerner remarked. "A game of that kind could not be worked with an able, cunning man like this doctor, for, no matter how smart the spies might be, if they kept constantly on his track he would be certain to discover them, and then the jig would be up."

"Exactly; you have figured the thing out correctly!" the superintendent declared.

"Mind you, old fellow, I went into this thing just to satisfy myself, and not with the expectation of being able to secure any proof that the Frenchman murdered the old man."

Old Sunflower nodded in token that he understood.

"I picked out a couple of good men, selecting a pair who could speak French, and were familiar with the people of the French quarter, used to going there, and on good terms with the restaurant men and saloon-keepers."

"I instructed them to go ahead in a quiet way to find out all they could about the doctor—his habits, particularly whether he was spending more money than usual."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"This inquiry was kept up until the Frenchman married the widow, and then, as no discoveries of any value had been made, I allowed the matter to drop."

"The disappointed relatives of Grandville had kicked up such a row about the will that it had set the French quarter by the ears, and though they did not dare to openly charge the doctor with having poisoned the old man, yet, secretly, the accusation was made and generally believed."

"The fact that the old Frenchman had married a young American wife was an important factor in making people suspect there was something wrong."

"That was natural, for the French are a very clannish people, and don't go much on outsiders."

"The feeling against both the widow and the doctor ran high, so Montlac lost about all his practice, and my spies reported that he seemed to have a hard time to get along; but then he developed remarkable skill as a card and billiards sharp, and as he managed to find pigeons to pluck—green young fellows, who had the idea they were great sports until they were relieved of their cash—he succeeded in living in pretty good style, though not able to cut the dash that he had formerly done."

"This report makes it appear to be certain that he did not collar the fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds," Old Sunflower observed.

"Yes, for I kept up the watch on him for nearly a year as I said, and he did not do anything during that time to indicate that he had any reserve funds, and right straight along too since then I have taken care not to lose sight of him—there is a good deal of the bull-dog about me, and I hate to be beaten—but nothing has come to light to indicate that he was the man who got the bonds."

"The woman had considerable money though, and I suppose he got what he wanted of that after they were married?" the Westerner suggested.

"Correct! and, according to all accounts, he made the money fly too, gave up his practice and went in as a high roller," the superintendent replied. "And, as he had been successful in skinning the little two-cent pigeons, he went in for big game—just for amusement, you know, not because he needed the money, but sharp as he was he met men who were sharper still. He made the mistake that almost all of these small-fry gamblers do, of thinking he was smart enough to beat the faro-banks."

"Tain't safe for to go into skin a man at his own game."

"That is true, but when a fellow gets a craze of that kind it isn't of any use to try to reason with him," the superintendent remarked.

"It is six or eight months now since I have heard anything about the man, and then the report was that he had evidently lost all his wife's money, for he was living in poor quarters on the East Side of town, had gone to practicing again, and also gone into his old trade of skinning flats out of small sums at billiards and cards, but, from your information, it is pretty evident he has gone from bad to worse and got in with a gang."

"Oh, yes, I do not think that is any doubt 'bout that!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "And as I have kinder got interested in this hyer matter, I reckon I will not go West until I have straightened it out."

"The woman is a victim and ought to be rescued from him, and his durned anxiety to get rid of her makes me think he has got some scheme on hand which he can't work while she is round."

"I should not be surprised," the superintendent remarked. "His fortunes are at a low ebb now, and he is the kind of man who would not be apt to have scruples at engaging in any kind of a game, as long as the risk was small and the chance for big plunder good."

"Give me his address and I will try my luck at piping 'im off for awhile."

The chief gave the information and then Old Sunflower rose to depart.

"I will keep you posted as to how I get on if I succeed in striking anything," the Westerner declared.

"Do so. I will be glad to give you all the aid in my power, for I should like to get a chance to put the bracelets on the Frenchman; I hate to be beaten by one of these confounded foreign rascals, you know," the chief declared.

"I don't blame you! I kinder feel that way myself," and then the Westerner departed.

He proceeded straight to the address given him by the superintendent.

As the chief had said, it was on the East Side of town, and in what is commonly termed the Jewish Quarter, on account of the number of Hebrews to be found there.

The doctor occupied a first-floor flat in a large, double tenement-house on Broome street, and after the Westerner took a careful survey of the premises he came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea for him to get a furnished room somewhere in the neighborhood.

Then, as he glanced around, he saw that rooms could be had in a dingy old-fashioned brick house directly opposite.

He proceeded at once to inquire and succeeded in renting a front room on the second story, so he would be able to see all who came in or out of the house where the Frenchman dwelt.

By this time it had got to be nearly seven o'clock and quite dark.

There was a street lamp directly opposite, so that Old Sunflower was able to distinguish the doctor's sign.

"Hello! that's a doctor across the way," he remarked to the sour-visaged woman who had the renting of the rooms.

"If a man is sick he could get a doctor quick!"

"Humph! you would have hard work to find that doctor at home!" she declared. "He is in one of the up-town hospitals and is away two-thirds of the time."

"It won't do, then, for a man to count on him."

"No, sir; there is another doctor, though, around the corner who has regular office hours, and there is no telling when you will find this one in."

This apparently unimportant bit of information gave rise immediately to a suspicion in the Westerner's mind which he put into words as he descended to the street, in quest of his supper, as he explained to the landlady.

"This office is a blind, and he has a roosting-place somewhere else," he muttered.

"He isn't in any hospital! That is only a stall to account for his absence."

"And the question is, will I be lucky enough to track him to his real abiding place? One thing is certain, I will make a good try at it, and if I can't do the job single-handed I will apply to the chief and have the best shadows there are in New York put on the Frenchman's track."

After he got his supper Old Sunflower returned to his quarters.

The Frenchman's apartments were still dark.

"There isn't any use of my wasting my time watching here," he soliloquized. "He may not

come to-night and I might as well go out and see a little life."

Acting on this idea the Westerner sallied forth, walked up Broome street to the Bowery, then up that thoroughfare to Fourth avenue, through Union Square into Broadway and, finally, tiring of walking, went into one of the theaters, where he remained until the performance ended.

It was eleven o'clock when he came out of the theater, and he took a cross-town car which carried him to Broome street, a couple of blocks from the one where his room was situated.

By this time it was close to midnight and the street was deserted.

Not a soul was in sight when Old Sunflower started to walk up the street.

The Westerner, busy with his thoughts, speculating how he had best proceed to get on the trail of the Frenchman, paid no heed to the loneliness of the thoroughfare.

It was all the same to him whether the street was thronged or deserted.

But in all great cities night prowlers are about, and two of these fellows were lounging on a stoop at the further end of the block when Old Sunflower got off the car.

And these ruffians were as quick to perceive that the tall, gaunt old fellow had all the appearance of a stranger, as the prairie wolves are to make the discovery that a single, leg-weary, weakened buffalo is lagging behind the main herd.

And, like the wolves, they prepared immediately to attack the prey.

"This bloke will be worth going for!" one rough exclaimed, directing the attention of the other to the man descending from the car.

"Tain't a good place for to work the strangle act," the other growled. "That blamed gas-lamp on the corner gives too much light."

"What is the difference?" argued the first ruffian. "Here's an alley where we kin hide and jump out on him as he comes along."

"I will put the choker on him, and you kin go through his pockets."

"It don't matter a blamed bit if the light is there; there isn't anybody round, and we kin do the trick and be off afore this jay knows what's up."

"All right! I'm wid yer."

And then the two skulked into the alley.

Up the street came Old Sunflower, and, as he passed the alley, one of the ruffians darted out and, throwing his right arm round his neck, pressed the other in the small of his back.

"What are ye 'bout, b'gosh!" cried Old Sunflower.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TOUGH, POODLE.

THE method of attack used by the ruffians was the ingenious one derived from the Spanish machine used for executing a criminal, the "garrote," and commonly called garroting.

The trick is for one man to half-strangle the victim, by passing an arm around the neck, bending the head violently backward, then holding it in a vise-like grip, while the confederate improves the opportunity to go through the pockets of the helpless man.

It is really wonderful, too, how quickly the trick is performed by experienced men, and the choked victim, when he is released, generally drops to the ground, perfectly helpless for the time being.

The ruffian who had seized Old Sunflower was a strong, muscular fellow, stout and thick-set, and bore the reputation of being one of the most expert garroters who had ever operated in the metropolis.

Taking the supposed countryman so completely by surprise, he anticipated that the operation of "getting away" with his valuables could be easily performed.

But for once in his life he met a man upon whom the trick could not be worked.

The moment the attack was made the Westerner comprehended the game.

Up went both hands, clutching the arms pressed around his neck, then, exerting all his wonderful strength, Old Sunflower pitched forward upon his knees.

The effect of this unexpected movement, which took the garroter completely by surprise, was to cause the ruffian to turn a complete somerset over the head of the Westerner.

The violent motion broke the garroter's hold on Old Sunflower's neck, and he came to the ground, striking on the flat of his back with tremendous force.

The movement was performed so quickly that the second ruffian, whose business it was to rob the victim while his comrade held him, had no chance to "get in" his work.

He had but just started when his pal's heels came flying through the air, and his back struck the sidewalk with a force which knocked the breath almost out of his body.

This unexpected performance filled the ruffian with dismay.

He was not a particularly quick or intelligent fellow, but he was not so dumb as to fail to understand they had caught a Tartar, and realizing that his comrade was completely

"knocked out," the ruffian took to his heels and ran for dear life.

"Come back hyer, ye durned galoot, and lemme git a crack at yer!" Old Sunflower shouted, in derision, as the tough ran up the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Ah, that feller hain't got any bit of sand!" the Westerner exclaimed, in a tone of disgust. "He ain't the kind of critter to stand up to the rack and take his gruel like a man."

"Now, then, lemme see what this feller looks like," and as he spoke he bent over the prostrate man.

By this time the breath of the ruffian had come back to him as the shock caused by the fall passed away.

Angrily he glared up at the Westerner, and his right hand moved toward his pocket.

The sharp eyes of Old Sunflower were quick to note the movement.

"Come, come, none of that now!" he exclaimed. "Don't you try to pull any we'pon on me, or I'll put my heel on your head, jest as if you was a p'ison serpent, and crush the life right out of you!"

"I wasn't going to pull no gun," the fellow replied, in a sulky way.

"Oh, come now! I know better than that!" Old Sunflower retorted. "I know you of old, Poodle, and you were allers one of those kind of men who, when they got into a tight place, pulled out a knife or a gun."

The ruffian was thoroughly astounded at being thus addressed by name, and as he rose slowly to his feet he stared at the Westerner.

"Don't know exactly what to make of it, Poodle, hey?" Old Sunflower exclaimed with a grin.

"Didn't reckon you were going to strike an old acquaintance when you went for me?"

"Blamed if I ever saw you before!" the other growled, very much mystified by this strange occurrence.

"Oh, yes, you did, I am an old friend of yours. I knew you when you used to travel with Irish Pat."

"Lemme see," Old Sunflower continued, in a reflective way.

"It seems to me that you two fellers used to do more business in the garroting way than any of the rest of the gang in that line."

"You had good innings until you ran foul of a Southerner who knew how to handle his gun, and as you didn't choke him enough to render him insensible, the moment you let go of him he pulled his revolver and opened fire on you."

"Irish Pat got the lead in his back, and it settled his hash as far as this world was concerned; you got it in the side, the cop nailed you and you went up for ten years."

"Who the blazes are you anyway?" the ruffian exclaimed in astonishment.

"Oh, I'm a man from the West, and out thar in the per-a-rie region they call me Old Sunflower, and I reckon that is jest as good a handle as any man needs for to travel with!"

"Well, it seems to me that I have seen you somewhere before, but I will be blamed if I can remember jest where it is now," the other remarked, slowly, scratching his head in a reflective way.

"Don't let that 'ar leetle thing worry you!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"But I say, Poodle, I heered that you were a reformed man," Old Sunflower continued. "Didn't one of the gospel sharps up at Sing Sing interest himself in you and get you pardoned out afore your time expired, on account of your having resolved to lead a squar' life?"

The ruffian was more and more astonished, and he stared at the Westerner in wonder.

"Don't stare, man!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "If you remember me it is all right. It don't make a bit of difference. You see that I know you like a book, but how 'bout this reformation business? Was that only a game of yours to get out of jail?"

"Oh, no! I was honest enough about it—I wish I may die if I wasn't!" the other declared, earnestly.

"Things didn't work right, eh, and you were forced back to a crooked life."

"Yes, that is the truth."

"Say! I've got a room on the next block!" ejaculated Old Sunflower, abruptly. "S'pose you come along with me and we kin talk thar as long as we want, and I reckon it won't be aray money out of your pocket if you come."

The man hesitated and looked at the Westerner in a suspicious way.

"Oh, you needn't be skeered!" the big fellow exclaimed. "Thar ain't no trap in it! You needn't be afread to come! I don't mean to play any tricks on ye."

"Why, man alive! I have got you foul now if I wanted to sock the iron home to you!" Old Sunflower continued.

"All I have to do is to collar ye and run you along until I strike a cop and then give you in charge; you would be in a mighty tight place, now, I reckon, wouldn't ye?"

"Yes, I s'pose I would," the man admitted, reluctantly.

"Come along with me, then; you won't be aray bit worse off," Old Sunflower argued.

And as this certainly seemed to be the truth,

the ex-convict concluded to accept the invitation.

Old Sunflower conducted the man to his apartment, and after they were comfortably seated, said:

"If you were honest in your resolve to give a crooked life the go-by, how comes it that I find you trying to work a racket like the one you were on to-night?"

"Because I am a fool!" the man replied, bluntly. "And, too, since I tried to turn over a new leaf, I have had the devil's own luck. I am a machinist by trade, but not a particularly good one, so when I get a situation, if there are any complaints in regard to me, I am not such a valuable man as to make the boss hesitate in regard to getting rid of me."

"Ah, yes, I understand."

"When I came down from the stone jug up the river, I had made up my mind never to do a crooked piece of work again."

"I got a good place, and for a while all went on well; then in some way it got around that I was a Sing Sing bird, and so many complaints were made to the boss by the other workmen that finally I was discharged."

"I see; it is the old story," the Westerner observed. "As I heerd a feller say once in a play on the stage, the convict's taint was on you, and you couldn't throw that off with the convict's jacket."

"That is it! That is the exact truth!" the other declared.

"I ain't got much of a story to tell. I worked when I could get work, and when I couldn't I went with the crooks again; but I have been extra careful, I hav'n't been pinched since the time I was sent up for the ten years that you were telling about."

"I wouldn't have been in this thing to-night if I hadn't happened to strike an awful bad run of luck lately. I was dead broke when I met this bloke, who skipped the moment there was any trouble, blame him! and he suggested that we might make a stake by trying the old garroting lay."

"Ah, yes, but it is risky business."

"We didn't reckon to try it on down in this quarter, but to go up on the avenues; but when you got off the car, my pal thought we could win a stake off of you."

"Appearances ar' mighty deceptive in this hyer world," Old Sunflower observed, with one of his good-natured grins.

"But I reckon it isn't going to turn out to be an unlucky thing for you, though," he continued. "I want a leetle bit of work done, and it 'pears to me that you ar' jest about the kind of man to do it."

"It is in the stool-pigeon line," he added.

"Well, I don't know; I never did anything of that kind," the other said, slowly.

"No one will know it, you know," Old Sunflower urged. "You will do business with me, not with the folks at Police Headquarters, and you never struck a more liberal paymaster in your life than I am if the work is only done to my satisfaction."

"There is something about you that gives me a deal of confidence!" the man exclaimed, abruptly. "And I will be hanged if I don't go into this scheme!"

"Mebbe you would stand a chance to be hanged if you didn't," the big Westerner suggested with a sly twinkle in his keen gray eyes.

"What do you want me to do?"

The Westerner described the doctor, the Irishman and the Ginney.

The ex-convict shook his head.

"I don't know any of them."

"They are making and shoving the queer I think," Old Sunflower declared.

"Now, then, it will be your leetle biz to hustle and git in with these bad money crooks; you can pretend, you know, that you think there is big money for you in that line, and if you strike the trail of these parties, use all your endeavors to get into their confidence."

The other said he had no objection to going into this scheme, so the Westerner paid twenty dollars earnest money and the ex-convict departed with a much lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom when he entered the room.

"Now, then, if that feller don't succeed in rooting out the Frenchman and his gang I shall be disappointed!" Old Sunflower declared.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER INFORMATION.

OLD SUNFLOWER was up early in the morning and betook himself to the Bowery, where he got his breakfast in one of the popular cheap restaurants so common in that neighborhood, and while he was busy with the meal he mused over the situation.

"I reckon that this hyer job that I have undertaken is a mighty difficult one," he soliloquized.

"It will not be hard to strike the Frenchman, but when it comes to finding out what he has done with his wife, it means work, and really, just at present, I don't exactly see how I am going to manage the trick."

"It is like the feller who said he could move the world if he could get a place to fix his lever. The beginning was all that troubled him; if he

could arrange that, the rest wouldn't be so hard.

"Now, that is jest about the way I am situated. If I could git a good start I have no doubt I would git along all right, but, durn me, if I see any way to make a break!"

"The Frenchman will hide the woman somewhar, of course. He might be shadowed, and tracked, but with such a wily customer as he is, and on his guard, too, anticipating danger, as he certainly will, the odds are big that the smartest spies in the city would not be able to make a success of the job."

"I might rope the chief of police into the game and have him set all the detectives at work to search for the woman, but I don't reckon they would be able to work the trick. It would be a good deal like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, for this hyer city is a mighty big place."

Then, suddenly, to the mind of the Westerner came the remembrance of the old Irishman, who had the little house on the Jersey shore.

"Why shouldn't I be able to git some information out of him?" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"I couldn't very well frighten the galoot into peaching on his pal, for I haven't got any hold on him yet, but I reckon I might bribe the cuss into betraying the Frenchman if I offered him what he would consider big money."

"There are mighty few of these common scoundrels who will not squeal on their pards if they can make a big stake by so doing, and they think thar is a good chance that nobody will ever find out who give the snap away."

Having determined upon this course of action, Old Sunflower finished his breakfast and started for the Weehawken Ferry.

He arrived just in time to catch one of the morning accommodation trains, and soon after was traversing the lonely road which led to McGunnigal's house.

"Now, then, if the Irishman ain't home, or happens to have a gang with him, I will not be able to do any business," Old Sunflower muttered as he arrived at the edge of the woodland.

Cautiously he peered out from amid the trees, taking care to keep himself concealed, and his eyes were gratified by the sight of McGunnigal seated on an overturned boat near the water's edge smoking a pipe and mending a net.

The Westerner's eyes wandered up and down the shore.

Not a soul was within sight.

"I reckon this hyer thing is going to work all right," the Westerner muttered.

"It mebbe that the Italian, or some other pal of this critter, is in one of the houses, but I shall have to risk that."

"By keeping al ng on the hillside until I git well above the houses I will be able to come down along the shore and keep the buildings between me and the Irishman, so he will not be able to detect my approach until I am right on him, and then, I reckon, that when I make my appearance it will be kind of a surprise party!" the Westerner declared with a chuckle.

He performed the maneuver without any difficulty, and, as he had anticipated, by keeping in the line of the house, approached McGunnigal, who had no idea that any one was in the neighborhood until Old Sunflower walked out from behind the nearest house, not twenty feet away from the old Irishman.

McGunnigal gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment, dropped the net as though it was burning his fingers, the pipe fell from his mouth, smashing into a dozen pieces, and he jumped to his feet, glancing around him as though looking for a weapon.

"How ar' ye, McGunnigal—how do you salute this morning, hey?" Old Sunflower exclaimed in the most friendly manner.

But the Irishman was not at all disposed to regard the new-comer as a friend.

"Phat do yees want here, ye murthing blaggard?" he cried.

"Come, come, old feller! that isn't the way to talk to a friend!" Old Sunflower declared.

"A fri'nd, is it? Bad 'cess to all such fri'nds as ye are!" the Irishman declared, indignantly.

"What is the matter with you? Durn me if I ever saw a more unreasonable man!"

"Bad scran to yees!" McGunnigal cried.

"Didn't ye try for to murther me?"

"Go 'long! I was only fooling with you. What kind of a man are you, anyway? Can't you take a joke?"

"A joke, is it? the Irishman asked. "Do you call it a joke to be afther scaring a man out of his siven sineses?"

"Wal, didn't you bring it on yourself?" the Westerner replied. "Didn't you and the Italian come at me like a pair of mad bulls, and do you s'pose I am the kind of critter to stand any foolishness like that?"

"We thought you were a spy of the fish-wards," the Irishman explained.

"There do be all sorts of dirty blaggards spying 'round anxious for to see that poor hard-working min, like meself, are not afther usin' the wrong kind of nets," he continued. "An i the Ginney and meself went in for to give yees a scare, so you wouldn't be afther loitering yees time away in this neighborhood."

"Oh, come down!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "That yarn is entirely too thin!"

"Upon me wourd it's the truth," the Irishman protested.

"Oh, no, you can't stuff me in this hyer way, you know, nohow you kin fix it!" the Westerner declared.

"I know jest how the old thing worked—I understand it jest as well as though I had got up the game myself. It was the Frenchman who sent you after me."

"The measly cuss thought he had put a bullet through my head, and that my goose was cook-ed, so he sent you and the Ginney to plant me, but I reckon you made the diskivery that I was the liveliest corpus you ever struck!" and the big Westerner indulged in a loud "Haw, haw!"

"Aba! it is a foine sinse of humor ye have!" McGunnigal exclaimed, sarcastically.

"Oh, yes, you will find that I am the funniest kind of a rooster when you come to git well acquainted with me!" Old Sunflower declared.

"But, McGunnigal, old times rocks, you can't pull no wool over my eyes, and you ar' only wasting time when you attempt to play any game of that kind."

"I know the Frenchman sent you and the Ginney to plant me, and he went in to lay me out 'cos I was taking an interest in his wife."

"You understand, McGunnigal, that woman would be all right if she was out of this durned Frenchman's clutches."

"Ah! phat do you suppose I care for them?" the Irishman exclaimed.

"Wal, I reckon, mebbe, that the Frenchman was a friend of yours."

"It's nothing to you whether he is or not!" McGunnigal retorted.

"I take an interest in the woman and that is what brings me up hyer to-day. I'm arter information."

"Be me sowl! ye'll get none from me, so put that in yer pipe and smoke it!" the old Irishman declared.

"Now, you don't want to make any donkey of yourself, McGunnigal!" Old Sunflower retorted.

"You must understand, you know, that if you work this trick the right way it will put some money in your pocket."

The Irishman looked surprised.

"Oh, I am giving it to you jest as straight as a string!" the Westerner continued.

"I want to find out what became of the woman, and if you kin give me the information I am willing to pay you well for it."

"This thing will be kept quiet, you know," Old Sunflower added. "I am not the man to give ary snap of the kind away. The Frenchman will never be able to find out how I got the information and you will be jest so many ducats ahead."

The dull eyes of the Irishman glistened at this seductive proposal, and the Westerner, keeping a close watch on the face of the other, saw he was inclined to accept the proposal.

Out came the big, old-fashioned wallet, and from it Old Sunflower drew a bunch of bank-notes, which he waved before the eyes of McGunnigal.

"Hyer's the old, solid stuff that talks! Now, then, jest you spit out what you know, about the woman, and you will stand a chance to grab some of these beauties! Speak quickly, you know, for time is flying!"

"It is a foine, persuasive way ye have wid ye," the Irishman remarked, with a grin.

"Oh, yes, I am a dandy coaxter, and no mista!" the Westerner declared.

"How much will I be afther getting?"

"That depends upon how valuable the information is to me," Old Sunflower replied.

"But I reckon you will not collar less than five dollars, and, mebbe, it will be ten, or twenty," he continued. "You see, in a racket of this kind you must allow me to be the judge in regard to how much the thing is worth to me."

"Oh, yis, of coarse, for that is something that I dunno."

"Go ahead!" exclaimed Old Sunflower, encouragingly.

The temptation had proved too much for the Irishman. Then, too, he reasoned that if he told the truth in regard to the woman he could not possibly damage his pal, the Frenchman, in any way.

And the wily Irishman chuckled to himself as he reflected that he would be paid for giving information when there was no excuse for concealing it.

He had to frame a lie in order not to betray the secret of the cellar, so he declared that the Frenchman, with the woman, had hidden away amid the shrubbery until he, Old Sunflower, had departed with the girl in the boat, then they came down to the house, and, after dark, the woman had slipped out.

He gave a full description of the search which they had made, relating the discovery of the smashed boat, clearly indicating that the woman, in attempting to escape across the river, had been run down by a steamer, and so perished.

For proof of the story McGunnigal pointed to the broken boat, upon which he had been sit-

ting, and the Westerner recognized it as the one in which the girl had rowed him across the river.

"She's dead, then," Old Sunflower remarked, in a disappointed way.

"Yis, sur," McGunnigal responded. "Those murthing st'mers race up the river like the devil! The boat was crushed like an egg-shell, and the woman stood no chance for her life, at all, at all!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLOODHOUND SHOWS HIS SKILL.

OLD SUNFLOWER shook his head slowly in a mournful way for a few moments, and then he said:

"Wal, I reckon this hyer thing lets me out of the consarn, and I will not have any call to bother my head 'bout it any more."

"The woman has passed in her checks, and that settles it—I don't s'pose thar is any bit of doubt but what she did go to the bottom?" he asked, abruptly.

"You don't reckon she might have been picked up by any passing vessel?"

"Not one chance in a thousand, sur!" McGunnigal exclaimed, in the most positive manner.

"Ah, no, she wint to the bottom yees may be shure! She was that w'ake that she couldn't have been afther k'aping afloat at all, at all."

"Metbe she is jest as well off," Old Sunflower remarked.

"And now phat do I get?" asked the Irishman, eagerly.

"Wal, I'll go you five, anyhow, although what you have told me don't amount to much," the Westerner remarked, as he handed the bills to McGunnigal, who received them with a grin of satisfaction.

"Mebbe it is worth the money, though, for me to know that I am through with the business," the Westerner continued, reflectively, as he returned his wallet to his pocket.

"Say, kin I git back to the railroad by going down along the shore and then taking a road inland?"

"Yis, sur; yees must kape along the shore for about half a mile, and thin whin the rocks come close to the water so that it is not convenient for yees to kape straight on, ye'll see a weeny path that is afther l'ading up through the bushes. Take that, kape on, and it will bring yees to the track, but it's a good two miles to the nearest station."

"All right! Much oblieged! See you ag'in, mebbe, some time," and then Old Sunflower departed.

After he got well out of the hearing of the Irishman, he put his thoughts into words, as was usual with him when deeply interested in any subject.

"Each man to his trade is an old saying, and it is a mighty true one," the Westerner exclaimed.

"Now I am a man-catcher—it was born in me, and I did not have to serve a long apprenticeship before I was recognized as a good workman, and so it follows that I see a deal more in this business than these scoundrels."

"Not much display of intelligence could be expected, of course, from either the Irishman or the Ginney, but the doctor is a man of education and brains, and there is not much doubt about his being an extremely able and cunning rascal."

"When it comes to the man-hunting business, though, he is not in it, and the trick which the woman played succeeded in completely fooling him."

"I can understand how the business was worked, though, and I smoked it the moment the boat was mentioned."

"She escaped from the house all right; she is not quite right in her head, and when the brain is affected, a wonderful display of cunning is sometimes made."

"When she came to the boat on the shore, with the oars in it, she did not attempt to use it as a means of escaping from the man she feared, for she had sense enough to understand that as she did not know how to handle the oars, she stood no chance of being able to get across the river; but she was cunning enough to understand that if she shoved the boat out into the river, so the tide would carry it away, when her absence was discovered, and search was made for her, the moment the fellows discovered the boat was gone they would immediately jump to the conclusion that she had taken it."

"Of course, that the boat would get stove in by a steamer, so as to give rise to the supposition she was drowned, was something that neither she nor anybody else would be apt to conjecture."

"All she thought of was securing her escape. She understood that her absence would soon be discovered, she knew immediate pursuit would be given, and she calculated that while her pursuers were searching for her on the river, she would be able to get away by land."

"This is the way I have got it all figured out, and I feel just as sure the thing happened just so as though I stood by and saw the trick worked."

"The next thing on the programme is to de-

cide which way she went after the boat was set adrift.

"Three ways were open to her—the road to the station, up, or down the river.

"New York, of course, was the p'int to which she would go, for she would be pretty certain to think she could hide away from her pursuers better in the big city than anywhere else.

"She would be apt to be afraid to take the train at the nearest station, for fear that some of the people here might remember her, and inform the Frenchman.

"It seems to me that she would instantly strike for the city as directly as possible, and in that case she would take this road, make her way to the railway track, go down the track until she came to a station and there take a train.

"The chances are good too, it seems to me, that she would not buy a ticket at the station, for fear of being traced, but would endeavor to steal on board of the train in the darkness.

"Now, then, I will do my level best on this case and see if I can't strike the trail."

While Old Sunflower had been indulging in these reflections he had been going onward at a good pace, but, in spite of that, he had been examining every foot of ground with the keen watchfulness of a veteran Indian trailer.

The thought had come to him that he might discover the footprints of the fleeing woman in some bit of smooth road.

And just as he came to where the ledge of rocks blocked the passage, and the little path, spoken of by the old Irishman, led up on the hillside, right before him in the soft ground were the clearly-defined marks of a woman's footsteps.

"Oho! I reckon this hyer is pretty good proof that I didn't make any bit of a mistake in my calculations!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"This hyer is the track of a well-shod woman, no country gal with broad, common shoes, but the dainty footprints of a lady.

"I am on the right track, and though she succeeded in fooling the Frenchman and his pards, yet she was not quite smart enough to pull the wool over my eyes."

Up the narrow path went the tracker, and he followed it until he came to the railway track, being careful to keep on the watch for more footprints, but as the ground was hard he did not make any discoveries until he came to the iron way. At this point the track was a little elevated, and on the edge of the embankment there were more footprints, and they plainly showed that the maker of them had gone down the track.

"She was bound for the city, as I supposed, and the chances are big that she took a train at the next station."

It did not take the big Westerner long to reach the railroad depôt, and during the walk he was gratified every now and then by seeing the woman's footprints.

Old Sunflower examined the ground closely as he approached the station, and was able to discover where the woman had stepped clear of the track on the side the railroad building was located, thus plainly indicating that it was her objective point.

The Westerner entered the station and examined the time-table, which showed him that a train left for the city at 7:58 at night.

"Wal, I reckon she could have caught that, all right," the tracker mused. "Now I must find out if the ticket-agent saw her."

The young man in charge of the station was disposed to be accommodating, and when Old Sunflower explained that he was anxious to find out if a certain lady—and he described the fugitive—had on the previous night taken the evening train to the city, he replied in the negative.

Only a couple of men had bought tickets.

"But she may have arrived just in time to catch the train," he added. "Then she would have got on board without buying a ticket, and I might not have seen her."

"By speaking to the conductor who ran the train you will probably be able to find out, for she would have to pay her fare to him, and he would be certain to remember if she was a passenger," he continued.

Then the obliging young man explained that this particular conductor would be along on the next train, which was due in a few minutes.

Old Sunflower thanked the station-agent for his information, and then when the train came along got on board.

As it happened the conductor was also another accommodating fellow and when Old Sunflower questioned him was willing to afford all the information in his power.

"Yes," a woman who answered to the description given by the seeker after knowledge had been a passenger on his train on the preceding evening.

She did not have a ticket and paid her fare to him.

He was positive in regard to the matter because the lady made a decided impression upon him, as she acted rather strangely.

She kept her val closely drawn, so as to conceal her features as much as possible, and took a

seat in the extreme end of the car as though shrinking from observation.

Then she had asked the conductor if the train went to New York, and this struck him as being an extremely odd circumstance, as it seemed very strange that she should have taken a train without being sure in regard to its destination.

Then, when she came to pay her fare, she lacked five cents of the amount, a circumstance which seemed to embarrass her greatly, and she produced a handsome gold watch and chain which she desired the conductor to take.

But he was a gallant man, and as he told Old Sunflower:

"I wasn't going to bother a lady for the sake of a nickel, so I told her it was all right; what she had was near enough, and I put her through on it."

CHAPTER XIV.

FOLLOWED UP.

"SART'IN," the big Westerner responded. "Of course a gentleman ain't going to be hard on a lady because she is a nickel short."

"Well, some men might object to put her through, but I am not built that way, and it was ridiculous for her to offer to put up a watch and chain worth fifty dollars of any man's money as security for five cents."

"You are right, by hookey!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "Thar wasn't ary bit of sense in a notion of that kind."

"I let her slide through all right, for I could see that she was a lady and from the way she looked it struck me that she didn't feel very well, so I was glad to do what I could to help her along."

"I reckon you ar one of the right sort, conductor!" Old Sunflower declared. "And it is my notion, too, that a man don't lose anything in the long run by doing little acts of kindness like this hyer."

"When you come to figura the thing right down, that is what we are in the world for," the official replied.

"I ain't much of a religious man, you understand," he continued. "Not near as regular in my church attendance as I might be, but when it comes to a little game of this kind I don't take a back seat for any deacon in the land!"

"Right you ar", by hookey!" the big Westerner declared. "You have got the thing down fine, and no mistake!"

The conductor laughed, then passed on, while Old Sunflower settled back in his seat, and put on his thinking-cap, figuratively speaking.

"I have got on her track, all right," he mused. "I did not make any mistake about the matter. Right from the beginning I reckoned she set the boat adrift jest to fool the men who she knew would lose no time in trying to hunt her down jest as soon as they made the discovery that she was among the missing."

"It was a mighty cute thing, I jest want you to know!" the big Westerner declared. And then he laid back in his seat and chuckled for a few moments.

"And it went through all right, too!

"The crony cusses found the boat on the river, stove in by some steamer, and they at once jumped to the conclusion that the woman, in attempting to escape, had been run down and drowned in the drink."

"Oho! it was a tarnation cute trick, and thar ain't no two ways 'bout it!" And then Old Sunflower chuckled again.

"But she wasn't smart enuff to fool this hyer coon," he continued.

"I suspected the little game, and so I managed to hit the trail off, all right!"

"Now, then, how does the thing stand?" he added in a reflective way.

"She has gone to New York—that is correct!

"Has she friends there to whom she will go?

"Oh, no, I do not think that is likely," he concluded with a wise shake of his shaggy head.

"She is mortal afraid of this black-muzzled Frenchman, and although she was all ready and perfectly willing to die, yet, at the last moment it is evident that the desire for life, which is so strong in the breast of every normal human, overpowered the morbid longing for death, and so she did her best to escape."

"She is now in the condition of a hunted animal, and when she gets to New York the odds ar 'bout a thousand to one, it seems to me, that she will not go near a soul she knows, but, on the contrary, will try to hide herself away, so as to avoid pursuit."

"P'int number one, then—she will hide!" and Old Sunflower emphasized his remark by holding up one big forefinger and tapping it with its fellow of the other hand.

"But a fugitive cannot find a hiding-place in a big, overgrown city like New York without money, and she hasn't got any cash."

"P'int number two—no cash!" and Old Sunflower held up two fingers.

"She is a shrewd, sensible woman, though, when she pulls herself together, and gits a good ready on, as the leetle boat trick plainly proves."

"On her watch and chain she kin raise money easily enuff by going to some pawnbroker's shop,

and as she is a woman used to the big city, she will be sart'in to know enuff to go ahead in that way."

"P'int number three—she will go for an 'uncle's' shebang as soon as she strikes the city."

"The chances are big that she is a stranger to the part of the town where the boat lands, and so she will be apt to inquire of some one 'bout the nearest pawnbroker."

"Who is she likely to strike for that information?—the policeman who is usually to be found in the neighborhood of the ferry, hey?"

"Wa-al, now, I reckon that is 'bout as sart'in as anything kin be!" Old Sunflower declared.

"P'int number four then nat'rally follers: brace the policeman, and ketch the information!"

And then the big Westerner chuckled in a good-natured way, being well satisfied that he had solved the problem.

In due time the train arrived at its destination, and Old Sunflower crossed on the ferry-boat to the New York side.

As he had anticipated, there was a big, jolly-looking policeman lounging on the outside of the ferry-house.

Old Sunflower accosted him.

"I say, my friend, can you tell me where I can find the nearest pawnshop?"

"Oh, yes, you just keep on up the street until you come to Eighth avenue, then turn to your right and you will find one a few blocks down," the blue-coat replied.

"Thanks! much obliged!" the big Westerner remarked, with a good-natured grin.

"I reckon you don't often have anybody strike you for information of this kind, hey?" he continued.

"Well, no, not often, although a woman did yesterday."

"Sakes alive! you don't say so!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "Wa-al, wa-al, it does take all sorts of people to make up a world, but I never would have reckoned that a woman would want to know anything 'bout such things!"

"Well, as to that, all you want to do is to keep your eyes on some of these low-down hockshops, and you will be surprised to see how many women patronize them," the policeman replied.

"I want to know?" Old Sunflower exclaimed with an expression of great interest.

"Oh, yes!" the officer replied. "Sunday and Monday exhausts the ready cash, then they put up their duds so as to raise the stamps to get along with during the week, and take the things out on Saturday night, when the old man gets home with his week's wages."

"It does jest beat all how some folks have to cut and contrive to live!" the big Westerner declared, with a wondering expression on his honest, weather-beaten face.

"This woman though wasn't one of that class," the policeman observed with the air of an oracle.

"She was a lady, but she looked pale and thin, as though she had just got up from a sick bed; probably ran out of cash in paying doctor's bills, and so had to raise a loan, you know."

"Likely, likely!" the big Westerner declared. "Wa-al, I'm much obliged!"

"Don't mention it," responded the officer.

Then Old Sunflower went on up the street, feeling extremely well-satisfied with himself.

"I have struck the trail all right," he murmured. "And now if the pawnbroker is one of the usual kind of men who run such establishments the chances are big that by the aid of a five-dollar note I will be able to get out of him all he knows about the woman, but I am afraid that he will not be able to give me much information, for he will not possess it."

"What I must build on is that if the woman has been once to the pawnshop the chances are great that her necessities will force her to make a second visit, and then, if the pawnbroker is aware that I am eager for information, and willing to pay a good price for it, he can make arrangements to have the woman followed, so as to be able to tell me exactly where she has taken refuge."

It will be seen from the above that the big Westerner was a shrewd calculator.

He went on until he came to Eighth avenue, into which he turned, and in a short time arrived at the pawnbroker's shop.

It was a dingy, dirty-looking place, and when the Westerner entered he found an old Jew behind the counter, a very unsavory specimen of his race.

The old man, and a sharp-faced, big-nosed lad of fifteen, or thereabouts, who so strongly resembled the old man as to suggest the idea that they were father and son, were the only occupants of the shop.

"How ar' ye?" Old Sunflower exclaimed in his genial way.

"I vas vell; how vas you, mine frien'?" the pawnbroker responded.

"Oh, I am able to sit up and get away with my three squar' meals a day!" the big Westerner declared with one of his prodigious grins.

"Say! I am arter a leetle information!" he continued.

"How vos dot?" the old man asked.

"Did a lady hock a watch or chain here last night?"

The Jew was on his guard in an instant.

A look of blank ignorance came over his face as he shook his head slowly.

"Mine frien', I would like to tells you how dot vas, but, you see, I vas avay last night und mine brudder vas here, so I do not know."

"Don't be skeered!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"It is all as straight as a string! The property belongs to the woman, all right! there isn't anything wrong about the matter but, for a private reason, I am anxious to find her, and if you will tell me what you know I'll go you a fiver!" And the big Westerner laid the bill on the counter.

The old Jew's eyes sparkled, and then he suddenly remembered that, before he went out, a lady did come in, but the address she gave was, he was sure, a false one; if she ever came back though, his son could follow her and find out where she lived if the gentleman was willing to pay for the service.

The Westerner made the Jew describe the lady, then, being satisfied that it was the one he sought, handed over the five dollars, and said he would pay liberally if the boy would play the spy on the woman if she returned.

The old Jew gladly consented, and Old Sunflower took his departure, not feeling quite as well satisfied as he had when he entered the pawnbroker's shop.

CHAPTER XV.

OLD SUNFLOWER PLAYS THE SPY.

"DURN me if this hyer don't beat all!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "I am clean beat now, and I will be hanged if I know what move to make next!"

"The woman is alive—she is here in New York and she has got a little money in her pocket—enough to keep her for a couple of weeks, say."

"These points I know, but where she has gone or how I must go to work to find her is a mystery, which, old man-hunter as I am, I cannot unravel."

"If I wasn't as well-posted as I am, I would be apt to make the mistake of thinking the chief of police, and his detectives, could do something for me, but in a case of this kind, the ordinary detective machinery cannot do much."

"The woman hasn't committed any crime, so there is not even the shadow of an excuse for arresting her, and therefore warnings cannot be sent out from every police-station looking to her apprehension."

"The only thing I can depend upon is what the story-writers call the chapter of accidents."

"Just by luck I may stumble upon some trace of her."

"Now let me cipher this thing out," he continued, as he proceeded down the avenue, strolling along like a man who hadn't a care in the world.

"Why do I want to get hold of this woman?

"Because the Frenchman is a rascal; the scoundrel attempted to murder me, and I am one of the kind of men who believes in getting square with any fellow who attempts any funny business of that kind with me."

"Now, then, if I can get hold of the woman, and she feels satisfied that the Frenchman cannot possibly harm her, the chances are big she may in time be persuaded to give some information which will enable me to get a hold on this foreign scamp."

"That is the programme, but the first step is to find the woman, and I reckon the odds are big that I will not be able to do it."

By this time Old Sunflower had got to Thirty-fourth street and he took a cross-town car which in time carried him to Broome street within a few blocks of his lodging-house.

He proceeded to the house, ascended to his room, and, drawing the blinds of his window in so he could watch all that went on in the street without being observed, sat down to finish the perusal of the morning newspaper which he had partially read on the train.

And ever and anon, too, he cast a glance over at the doctor's office, hoping to catch sight of the Frenchman.

But his expectation in this respect was not realized.

The curtains of the windows continued tightly drawn, an apparent proof that the doctor had not returned.

And so the day passed away, and at last night came.

The Westerner did not grow impatient at his want of success in spotting the Frenchman.

He was an old hand at this sort of thing, and fully understood that it was not possible for him to do anything to hurry matters forward.

The detective must learn to labor and to wait.

Old Sunflower had a great deal of confidence that the rustian, Poodle Peters, would be able to do good work.

He knew the man to be a shrewd and able fellow, and, if he could be trusted, there was a good chance he would be able to discover if the Frenchman was connected with a gang engaged

in manufacturing and passing bad money, as the Westerner suspected.

Despite the fact that the man's record was so bad, Old Sunflower had considerable confidence that the ex-convict would be faithful to the trust reposed in him.

He had argued the matter out in this way.

If any reliance could be placed in the man's word, he desired to reform, and here was as good a chance presented to him as he could possibly desire.

If in his capacity of stool-pigeon he succeeded in gaining any important information, he knew he would not only be well paid, but he could count on constant employment, and, though the position was rather a disagreeable one, yet it was far better for him to lead such a life than to keep on in a career of crime in constant apprehension of being arrested.

After he got his supper, the Westerner lit his lamp and sat down to read the evening newspaper.

As we have said, he had a front room, a good-sized apartment, on the second floor; the bed stood against the back wall, and at the foot of the bed was a door which led into a rear room which was the counterpart of the front one.

The Westerner was familiar with the rear apartment, for the landlady had shown it to him when he applied for accommodations.

She explained that this room was rented to a young lady, but, if he preferred it to the front one, the lady would have no objection to changing.

But as the front apartment was what Old Sunflower wanted, his object being to get a room from which he could watch the doctor's office opposite, he had chosen it.

There was a common lock on the door, and the Westerner, whose keen eyes, trained by long experience, allowed but little to escape them, noticed that the catch which received the bolt of the lock was loose, so that a vigorous push would force the door in, the lock being in the rear room.

"I reckon nobody will trouble me," he thought, and so he did not speak to the landlady about the insecure fastening.

But just after he sat down to read his newspaper, occupying a seat by the little table placed against the wall near the door, a circumstance occurred which caused his mind to revert immediately to the lock.

Just as he had become interested in the journal, he heard some one enter the rear apartment, and then the rustle of skirts told him it was a woman.

He could hear her moving about in the room, and then came the noise of a sewing-machine, showing that the girl was hard at work.

Ten minutes later he heard the door open and shut abruptly; the girl gave a little cry of alarm, and then there was the sound of a man's footprint, apparently hastening across the room.

"Hello! what's up now, I wonder?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, proceeding with noiseless steps to the door so he could listen.

The door had warped, so there was a crack along the opening, thus allowing the Westerner to hear all that was said in the other apartment almost as well as though he had been in the room.

Distinctly to his ears came the sound of a hoarse male voice.

"What is the matter with you?" the man cried. "Are you scared out of your wits because I come in to see you?"

"You certainly startled me," the girl replied. "And it is not strange, either, for you never took the trouble to knock, but came in without the slightest warning, and, by the way, I will thank you not to do it again, for I do not like any such proceeding. You should have the politeness to knock before entering a lady's apartment."

It was evident from the tone of the girl that she resented the intrusion.

"Well, I had an idea that if I knocked, and you came to the door, you would not be inclined to let me in," the visitor remarked in a sulky way.

"You are quite right! I should not have been willing to admit you!" the girl declared, spiritedly.

"That is just what I thought and so I bolted in without knocking!"

"Well, sir, I consider it a very imprudent proceeding!" the girl exclaimed. "And you will oblige me very much if you will have the kindness to go away!"

"Oh, you don't want to see me?"

"No, sir, I do not!"

"There was a time though when you appeared to be glad of my company!" the man retorted.

"No, you are wrong in regard to that. There never was a time when I was glad to see you," the girl declared in firm, distinct tones.

"And you make a great mistake in believing anything of the kind."

"I merely treated you civilly, just as I would treat any casual acquaintance, and as you lived in the same house with me, and we were both employed by the same firm, when you walked to and from the shop by my side I could not very well get rid of you without being rude."

"I did not like to tell you in plain words that

I did not want your company, and I would rather go alone, but I have been conscious for some time that I made a mistake in not speaking, and, lately, I have been endeavoring to show you by my actions that your attentions were unwelcome."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that—I am not blind, nor am I a fool!" the man declared.

"If you comprehend then that your attentions are distasteful to me why do you call upon me without an invitation?"

"Because I want to have a talk with you about this matter."

"I do not think it is necessary we should have any conversation upon the subject," the girl replied, haughtily, evidently resenting the threatening tone of the other.

"Well, I consider it necessary!" the man declared, in an angry way. "I want you to understand that I know just how this affair is; I know why you don't want me to come after you as much as you did."

"You are entirely wrong in that assumption!" the girl declared, immediately. "I never was willing to receive your attentions, and did all I could to discourage them as soon as I perceived you wished me to regard you as being something more than a friend."

"Oh, no, it is this infernal doctor—this cursed Frenchman over opposite!" the man exclaimed, in angry tones.

"Hello, hello!" Old Sunflower muttered, under his breath, "this hyer is getting interesting! Anything that consarns the Frenchman is jest old pie for me, you bet!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WESTERNER INTERFERES.

"You must not think I am so blind as not to understand what has been going on," the man continued. "I told my aunt right at the beginning that this doctor was struck after you; that was three months ago, and ever since that time I have had my eyes upon you, and I can plainly see that his attentions are not unwelcome, if mine are."

"So you have been playing the spy upon me?" the girl exclaimed, in a tone full of disdain.

"Yes, I have!" the man retorted, angrily. "And though you may be able to fool my aunt with this yarn about your going to the doctor's office two evenings a week to do writing for him, I know it is only an excuse so he can make love to you."

"If that statement is true, it is none of your business!" the girl retorted, indignantly.

"But it is not the truth as far as I am concerned. I do go to his office twice a week in the evening to write for him. He is translating a scientific work from French into English, and as he does not write a good hand, while I do, he has employed me to do the writing. It is a relief from my sewing, and so I am very glad indeed to be able to earn the money."

"It is only a trick on his part so as to be able to get a chance to talk to you without interruption!" the man declared.

"Supposing that to be true, it is no concern of yours, as I said before," the girl retorted, spiritedly.

"What? do you mean to tell me that I havn't a right to busy myself about what my rival does? If it wasn't for him, with his smooth, sneaky ways, I might be able to stand some chance."

"No, you wouldn't!" exclaimed the girl, evidently provoked to anger by the speech. "The doctor is not your rival, for I have never even thought of you as a suitor, and I will tell you frankly, Salem Murphy, that if there wasn't another man on the face of the earth, I wouldn't have you for a sweetheart!"

Then to the ears of Old Sunflower came the sound of a struggle, and he deemed it high time for him to interfere.

Putting his broad shoulders to the door, he easily forced it open and made his entrance into the apartment.

A slightly-built, sallow-faced young man, of twenty-two or three, with a dissipated look, had a pretty, black-haired, black-eyed girl by the throat.

The fellow had evidently been drinking, and the girl's words had roused him to such a pitch of anger that a desire to murder her had taken possession of him.

The big Westerner did not stop to waste any words on the man, but as the fellow, alarmed by his abrupt appearance, released his hold on the girl and turned to meet the intruder, Old Sunflower grasped him by the throat, and, despite the man's struggles, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Durn your ugly pictur'! you want to choke folks, do you? B'gosh! I'll jest give you a leetle taste of your own medicine so you kin git a good notion of how the old thing works!" the intruder exclaimed, as he danced the fellow up and down, squeezing his windpipe until the man began to turn black in the face.

The girl had retreated to a corner of the room when released, trembling with excitement.

"Jist you say the word, miss, and, go-dam-

me! if I won't jest choke the life out of the pesky critter!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Don't hurt him, I beg!" the girl exclaimed, with trembling lips, still quivering with excitement.

"Do you hear that, you slab-sided limb of mischief?" the big Westerner asked, loosening his grip on the young fellow's throat a little.

And it was about time, for the life of the man had nearly been choked out of him by Old Sunflower's muscular hands.

"It is mighty lucky for this imp of mischief that you took it into your head to say a good word for him," Old Sunflower continued. "For I never had a bigger desire to send a critter to Kingdom Come in all my born days."

And then with a push he sent the young man reeling backward.

Down in the corner went the fellow, all in a heap, in a state of collapse.

Never in all his life had he been so roughly handled.

"He has been drinking, I think, and so I don't suppose he really knew just exactly what he was doing," the girl remarked.

"The p'isoned snake!" the big Westerner exclaimed. "What business has he got to go and fill himself up with bug-juice and then come 'round a-trying to frighten people out of their seven senses?" and then Old Sunflower shook his big fist at the young man.

By this time the fellow had recovered his breath; he rose slowly to his feet, his face livid with rage, but, although he was a prey to the most violent anger, yet he did not dare to attempt to attack the stranger, for the sample which he had had of the other's quality was quite sufficient to convince him that in a personal encounter he stood absolutely no chance.

But for all that he could not help vaporizing a bit.

"Why didn't you give me some show?" he demanded. "Why did you jump on me without warning? Do you think that is a fair shake?"

"Sakes alive, man! what ar' you talking about?" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"Hyer I caught you choking this ar' young lady, jest as if you intended to murder her, and I reckon you were jest about crazy enough to do it, too, and now you git mad on account of my giving you a leetle gentle hint that the thing wasn't right.

"It appears to me that you must be a tough man to do business with!

"The idee of your having the gall to make a fuss because I took hold of you! Darn me if I ever heerd of such cheek!"

"Why, young man, I ought to have jest wiped the floor with you—melted you right down to a grease spot, in fact!"

"I was only fooling with the girl—I did not intend to hurt her," the young fellow declared in a sulky way.

"Of course! and I was only jest foolin' with you, when I grabbed you jest now. Sakes alive! if I had choked the life out of you it would only have been in fun!"

"I don't see that you had any call to interfere!" the other exclaimed, angrily.

"Sart'in! nobody ought for to interfere when a galoot about your size sees fit to go on the rampage and raise merry blazes ginerally!" Old Sunflower exclaimed in a very sarcastic way.

"But, my tulip on a lily root, I am jest the kind of man who will do that sort of thing, and now since I have become mixed up in this affair I propose to go in for to straighten the thing out a leetle if I kin."

"It is none of your business!" the young fellow asserted, indignantly.

"Ah, yes, mebbe it isn't, but I don't intend to go in to argue that p'ut with you, for, you see, I am one of the kind of men who like to interfere sometimes when it might be a heap of dollars in their pockets if they kept their paws off and didn't."

"Now, then, lemme see, if I have got this hyer matter all straight!" Old Sunflower exclaimed with a wise look.

"You have got a kind of a sneaking notion that you would like to make up to this hyer lady and she won't have it, and, my young friend, lemme tell you that she has a perfect right to kick ag'in' receiving your attentions if she wants to, and all you kin do is to grin and bear it."

"Now, as I am a kinder fatherly old galoot I propose to take an active part in this hyer matter."

"The gal wants you to keep your distance! Do you understand that? Is good United States talk plain to you?"

"You ar' to keep away from her, and if you don't, I will take it upon myself to 'warm you'!"

And at this point, in order to give due emphasis to the speech, the Westerner doubled up his huge fist and shook it at the scowling young man.

"I reckon you kin git this hyer plain kind of talk through your head, can't you?" Old Sunflower continued. "I want the thing understood, you know: and I hope you have got the idee into your noodle that I am one of the kind of men whom you can depend upon to do jest about as he says, every time."

"I don't see that it is any business of yours," Murphy rejoined, in an extremely sulky way.

"It isn't!" Old Sunflower declared, immediately. "And I didn't say it was, either; but I am interfering on general principles."

"I kin see with half an eye that you ar' one of those weak-headed young men who, when they go on a tear, go in for to smash things, and the very best cure for a complaint of that kind is for the individual to run up ag'in' some old he-b'ar of a man like myself—some tough old cuss who is able to take a hold of the idiot by the coat-collar and shake him until he reckons all his teeth ar' falling out, and by the time he comes to that conclusion he begins to git some sense into him."

"Now, understand, young man, if I ever hear of your troubling this lady ag'in', I will take hold of you in such a way that, before I have 'rastled you a minute you will wish you had never been born!"

By this time young Murphy had sobered up a little, and, as he was not of the stuff of which desperadoes are made, he came to the conclusion he had better not irritate the big stranger into a quarrel.

"I didn't mean to hurt the lady," he said, in a sullen way. "I know I was rough, but I had been drinking a little, or else I wouldn't have done it."

"Sue will excuse you this time, I reckon, if you will agree to keep your distance in the future, hey, miss?" Old Sunflower asked.

"Oh, yes; I do not bear any malice, but I do not want to be troubled," the girl replied.

"I reckon he will promise to let you alone arter this, hey, young fellow!" the Westerner exclaimed.

It was a bitter pill for Murphy to swallow, but as he stood in deadly fear of the man who had handled him so roughly, he reluctantly said:

"That is all right; I sha'n't go near her, if she don't want me to."

"Now you ar' talking!" Old Sunflower declared. "It makes me grin to see that you have got some sense into you at last."

"Now, jest put on your thinking-cap and meditate over this hyer business for a while," the Westerner continued.

"Jest see what a fool a man can make of himself to run arter a gal who don't keer anything 'bout him, and how ridiculous the notion is that a man can make a gal like him by bothering the life out of her."

"I will not trouble her again, and she can go with a dozen Frenchmen for all I care!"

And with this declaration the young man departed.

"A good riddance to bad rubbish!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "I reckon he will let you alone in the future; and now, miss, I would like to have a leetle talk with you, if you don't mind."

"Certainly not," the girl responded, somewhat surprised.

CHAPTER XVII.

HER STORY.

"If you hav'n't any objection I will sit down and make myself comfortable, for I reckon I will have to stay awhile," Old Sunflower observed in his good-natured way.

"Of course! Excuse me for not offering you a chair," the girl replied, hastening now to do so.

"But that rude young man agitated me so that I hardly know what I am about."

"That is all right," the Westerner replied, as he took the chair.

"I don't wonder at your being frustrated," he continued. "The way that young idiot acted was enough to upset any gal."

"Mighty queer idee he has of the way to make a gal like him—to take her by the throat and choke her!"

"Oh, well, he had been drinking," the girl responded, as she also seated herself. "And I don't suppose he really knew what he was doing, and I do not believe he would have dared to injure me, his idea being, I think, to give me a good scare; still, I am just as much obliged to you for coming so promptly to my rescue, for he might have hurt me badly without intending to do so."

"That is true! He had jest about liquor enough on board to make him ugly, and I reckon he will not trouble you ag'in'. If he does I will come down on him like a thousand of bricks!"

"I am ever so much obliged to you!" the girl declared, gratefully.

"It was jest a piece of luck for the door to be between the two rooms," the Westerner remarked.

"I sat by the wall, reading, when I heered him bounce into your room, and the leetle squeal which came from you made me think that was something wrong, so I pricked up my ears and listened, and then when he grabbed you I thought it was about time for me to chip into the game."

"I'm the new lodger, you understand, that has jest taken the front room."

"Yes, the landlady told me she had rented it."

"Now, miss, I s'pose you ar' kinder astonished at my wanting to have a bit of a talk with you," Old Sunflower remarked, abruptly. "But, you see, I am a queer old codger and git some mighty strange ideas into my head sometimes."

"Now, when I was listening at the door—twa'n't no harm to do that, you know, to my thinking, seeing as how I thought that was going to be trouble."

"Oh, no!" the girl exclaimed. "No one could possibly blame you for listening under the circumstances. I do not believe there is anybody but would have done the same."

"My conscience is clear as far as that is concerned," Old Sunflower declared.

"Wal, as I was a-saying, I listened, and as that is a big crack by the side of the door I did. u't have ary bit of trouble in hearing every word that was said, and when the young feller commenced to talk about the French doctor over opposite I began to take an interest in the proceedings."

"Are you acquainted with Doctor Montiac?" the girl asked, a slight blush appearing on her cheeks.

"Wal, I don't know much about him, but the little I do know makes me anxious to know more," the Westerner explained.

"You see, miss, I am from the West—a stranger hyer in New York, you might say, and I have kinder run up ag'in' the doctor in such a way as to make me think that he ain't any better than he ought to be, and as I am a pesky curious old chap I made up my mind to find out all I could about him."

"Well, really, I do not believe I will be able to give you much information," the girl said. "The gentleman is almost a stranger to me."

"I was taken suddenly sick about a month ago and sent for him to attend me. I feared I was going to have a severe illness, but it was nothing but a trifling indisposition and soon passed away."

"That was how you happened to make his acquaintance?"

"Yes, and then when I went to his office to pay the bill, he received me in a very friendly manner, and r' used to take any money, saying that the service which he had rendered me was so slight he did not consider it to be worth anything."

"That was kind."

"Yes, but I told him I did not like to have the matter arranged in that way, for unless he permitted me to pay him something, I should feel that I was under obligations to him."

"Sart'in! that is correct."

"Then, after reflecting upon the matter for a moment, he said an idea had occurred to him, which, if it was agreeable to me, would settle the matter, and then he explained how he wished to translate a French scientific work into English, but as he was not a good penman, and not completely familiar with the English language, although able to speak it fluently enough, he desired some one to write for him, and he was prepared to pay liberally for the service.

"His time was so occupied that he could only give two evenings in the week to the work, and so it would not interfere with any day work that the writer might have."

"You were glad to take the job, of course," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Yes, I was, indeed!" the girl declared. "I am a scarf-maker, working by day in the shop, and at night at home here, and as he offered me five dollars a week for two nights' work, which was about four times what I could make out of my night work on my scarfs, I was glad to accept it."

"Of course! it was good pay."

"This arrangement has continued for about a month now, and at the rate we are progressing, I should judge that it will take six months more to complete the task."

"How may I call your name, by the way?" the Westerner asked, abruptly.

"Camille Scarlett."

"That is a pretty name," the man remarked, with an approving nod. "My handle is Jonathan Flowers, and I am a ranchman from the wilds of the West."

"I am from the West, too—from Chicago," the girl said.

"Oh, then, you ain't a New Yorker?"

"No, sir."

"Got relatives hyer?"

"No, sir, I am an orphan without a relative in the world."

"Sho! you don't tell me!"

"Yes, sir, it is the truth."

"What ar' you a-doing on hyer, then—but, thar, I am axing questions which may be unpleasant," he added.

"Oh, no, I have no objection to telling you my story, for there is something about you—although you are a total stranger—which gives me the impression that you will not make an improper use of any confidence which may be reposed in you."

"Leetle gal! you ar' safe in betting your life on that ar'l" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"I am a rough and tough old customer, but I am the proper kind of a chap to tie to, every time, so don't you be afraid to go in and tell your story, 'cos it may turn out, you know,

that I kin be of assistance to you, and if I kin, you kin bet a big pile of rocks that when the time arrives for me to come to the front, I will be thar, as large as life and twice as natural!"

"My story is a rather strange one, and there is a mystery attached to it which I presume will never be unraveled."

"A mystery, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wal, now, you jest go ahead and fire away with your yarn!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "If thar is anything in this world that I am fond of, it is a mystery, and whar I come from the folks allers considered me to be a first-class hand at gitting to the bottom of anything of the kind, so jest go ahead with the tale, and mebbe I kin let daylight right into the hull blamed business, and if I kin I will do it in a minnit!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERY.

THE girl shook her head, and it was plain from the expression on her face that she had considerable doubt in regard to the Westerner's being able to accomplish this feat.

"Wal, I kin make a try at it, anyway!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"I have not really much to tell," Camille remarked, in a thoughtful way. "For the story of my life is a simple one."

"I was born in Chicago twenty-one years ago," she continued. "My mother was an orphan girl without relatives and with very few friends. Her parents died when she was about fifteen years old, and she was forced to go out in the world and work for a living."

"She followed different avocations until she was about twenty, when she got a position as cashier in a large restaurant, and there she made the acquaintance of my father."

"He was a commercial traveler in the employ of the Old Virginia Tobacco Company of New York."

"That is a new consarn to me," Old Sunflower observed, at this point. "And I reckoned, too, that I was pretty well posted in regard to all the prominent houses in that line."

"Yes, in regard to that I will speak later," Camille remarked.

"My mother boarded on the north side, and my father, who fell in love with her at first sight, contrived to find out where she lived, and secured board there also."

"I see; that was so he could make her acquaintance."

"Yes, sir; and as he was very much in love with her, while she was heart-free, he contrived in a short time to secure her consent to be married, although he was fully thirty years the elder."

"Them leetle things don't count sometimes."

"He told my mother that he had a good salary and had put by considerable money, and after they were married, he bought a pretty little cottage in the outskirts of the city, and there I was born."

"My mother's married life was an uneventful one; she and my father living very happily together, and all the worry that she ever had was occasioned by his being obliged to be away from his home so much. As a traveling man, of course, it was not possible for him to remain at home and at the same time attend to his business."

"Sart'inly not!"

"Five years ago—I was fifteen then—my father went away on a business trip, and he never came back, nor did my mother ever hear a word from him after the first month."

"He was not much given to letter-writing, for he said that when on the road he did not have time, and so he usually waited until he got to New York."

"Father was seldom absent over three months at a time, and when the fourth month came, and no word came from him, mother began to worry dreadfully."

"His address in New York was at a certain number in Fourth avenue, and after mother had written three letters without receiving an answer, she plucked up courage to take a trip to New York."

"That was natural; and how did she make out?"

"Very poorly. When she went to Fourth avenue, she found that the place was a small bookstore, where they rented private letter-boxes, as they called them, and all they knew of Valentine Scarlett—so my father was named—was that a gentleman by that name rented a box there, and came every now and then for his letters, but they had not seen him for three or four months, and knew nothing whatever as to where he could be found."

"Mighty mysterious, for a fact!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"My mother inquired in regard to her letters and found they were in the box, not having been called for."

"Then she endeavored to find the office, or factory of the Old Virginia Tobacco Company, and, to her utter surprise, discovered there wasn't any such company in New York, and never

had been, nor anywhere else, so the prominent men in the tobacco business told her."

"I anticipated it would turn out that way as soon as you mentioned the name of the company."

"In her bewilderment my mother told her story to the landlord of the hotel where we were staying, and he, a kind-hearted man, volunteered to go with my mother to the chief of police."

"Under such circumstances the chief of police couldn't do anything," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Yes, that is what the superintendent said after my mother told her story."

"He seemed to take a great interest in the matter and was very kind and courteous," the girl continued. "He explained that all he could do would be to send out notice to his men to be on the lookout, but from the fact that the letters had not been called for it would seem as though my father had not come to New York."

"That was a nat'r'al conclusion."

"And he was inclined to believe too that my mother had made some mistake in regard to the name of the tobacco company in whose employ my father was, and recommended her to visit all the prominent houses in that trade and make inquiries, for if he was a commercial traveler in the tobacco line, some of the firms would be certain to know something about him."

"Oh, yes, that was correct."

"And he further advised that my mother should advertise in the prominent New York newspapers, offering a reward to any one who could give information of the missing man."

"That ought to have worked."

"My mother followed the advice but did not succeed in gaining any tidings, nor did the advertisement produce any results," Camille remarked.

"The only letters she received were from private detective firms, who offered to undertake to find my father if she was disposed to pay for the service."

"Oh, yes; gentlemen in that line of business are always on the lookout for a job," Old Sunflower observed.

"Thar are some few good men in the business," he continued. "But the majority of them are out and out frauds."

"My mother, of course, had no knowledge in regard to anything of this kind, but in her anxiety, like a drowning man clutching at straws, she was willing to try anything which seemed to promise success."

"She took the precaution though of consulting the landlord of the hotel about the matter," Camille continued. "He thought it was a good idea and recommended a certain firm which he knew to be a reliable one."

"But the investigation didn't produce any results, I reckon!"

"Your surmise is correct; the detectives failed completely, and my mother, almost heartbroken, returned to Chicago."

"She never recovered from the terrible blow, for she idolized her husband, notwithstanding the fact that he was almost old enough to be her father, for he was one of the best of husbands, and a kinder parent a daughter never had."

"No wonder that your mother took the thing so much to heart."

"Yes; she never recovered from the shock. She was not a strong woman, and slowly her life ebbed away."

"Luckily the pangs of poverty were not added to her sufferings, for she had quite a little sum in the bank at the time of my father's unaccountable disappearance. He allowed her a liberal amount to support the house, and as she was a careful, prudent woman, she managed to save a few dollars each week."

"Then, by renting the greater part of the house, she secured enough to live on."

"She always had the hope that my father would return some day, for she could not bring herself to believe that he would willfully desert her and the child whom he loved so well."

"It was her idea that business might have taken him away to some foreign country and his letters to her had miscarried, and in time he would return."

"Wal, sich things as that have happened," Old Sunflower remarked.

"She passed away at last and her little property came to me, but she had talked so much about this great city of New York holding the secret of my father's disappearance that I determined to come here, hoping by some lucky chance to be able to solve the mystery."

"I sold the house and invested the money in a mortgage, which gives me just about money enough for a support: but on my way to this city I made the acquaintance of a young girl on the train, a scarf-maker by trade, and she offered to teach me, and so that is how I came to be a scarf-maker, and in this house, for the lady here is her aunt."

"Yes, I see."

"And then there was another circumstance, too, which rather inclined me to leave Chicago," the girl remarked, a little embarrassed perceptible in her manner.

"A few months after my father's disappearance—some five or six, I think—an old gentleman called at the house and inquired for Mr.

Scarlett, saying he desired to see him upon business, and he came again and again, until finally my mother told him the story of the mysterious disappearance.

"He expressed great sympathy, and said he was a lawyer and that my father had employed him to attend to some little business matters, and he had taken the liberty of calling to say he would be pleased to attend to any matters in his line."

"Rather odd proceeding," Old Sunflower commented. "Lawyers don't generally drum up clients in that way."

"He begged permission to call again, which my mother granted, for he was a smooth, plausible talker."

"From the beginning he appeared to take a great interest in me, and at last really made love in the most energetic fashion, despite the fact that I told him plainly that I did not care for him."

"This hyer lawyer must be a mighty queer kind of a man."

"He bears a good reputation, and everybody speaks well of him. He is quite a wealthy man, I believe; he is a real-e state lawyer, not practicing in the courts."

"Ah, yes, I see. And I s'pose one reason why you wanted to come to New York was to git rid of his bothering?"

"Yes," replied Camille, with a laugh. "I really got tired of the old gentleman's nonsense, although I must do him the justice to say that he was always respectful and polite, but going on the idea that I was a child who did not know her own mind, and so in order to get rid of him I fairly ran away."

"Does he know where you are?"

"Oh, yes; I told him I was going to New York, but he thought I merely intended to make a visit, and had no idea I intended to remain here."

"Wal, now, miss, mebbe you wouldn't think it, but I reckon you have done the best thing you could for yourself in telling me this hyer story, although I am a stranger whom you don't know from Adam."

"I don't exactly understand how it is I came to make the revelation," Camille remarked, musingly. "But I suppose it is because there is something about you which seemed to invite my confidence."

"Sart'in! I kin understand the feeling. I am rough and tough, but in the hour of trouble jest the kind of man to tie to!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Now, miss, I want you to have faith in me," he continued. "I want you to believe I kin be of great help in gitting at the heart of this 'ar mystery which has thrown sich a cloud over all your young life."

"It was jest a merciful Providence which has thrown us together," the big Westerner added, impressively.

"And it was one of those wonderful things which sometimes happen in this world," he went on.

"I am trying to straighten out a tangled skein, and so ar' you."

"Without my help I don't reckon you could have done anything, and I am afraid I would have had to grope a long time in the dark if I had not had the luck to meet you: but the way the thing is, I can't go into explanations without endangering the success of my game, so I shall have to ask you to go it blind."

"Trust me, and try to believe that you havn't got ary better friend in the world than a rough and tough old galoot about my size!"

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD SUNFLOWER'S SUSPICIONS.

FOR a moment the young girl fixed her clear eyes intently on the rugged face of Old Sunflower, as though she would read his very soul, and then she impulsively extended her hand.

"Yes, I will trust you, fully and faithfully!" she exclaimed. "For, although you are a stranger, yet there is something in your face which impresses me with the belief that you will be a true friend to me."

Old Sunflower grasped the hand of the girl and shook it in the hearty, vigorous way peculiar to him.

"Young lady, you'll find that you haven't made any mistake!" he declared.

"I am not particularly handsome to look at, but I am chain-lightning on the go, and when I git to work I am one of the kind of ha'pins that make the chips fly."

"Now I am going to ask you a few questions," he continued, after a moment's pause.

"Mebbe you may take the notion into your head that I am awful inquisitive—that I am poking my nose into something that ain't no consarn of mine," he added. "But you mustn't go for to make any break of that kind, for it would be a mistake."

"I can't tell you why I ask the questions, for, as I said afore, it will not do for me to explain my game jest now."

"Do not trouble yourself in regard to that," the girl remarked, smilingly.

"Although you are a stranger to me I have already sufficient confidence in you to believe

Old Sunflower, the Silent Smiter.

you would not question me merely to satisfy idle curiosity."

"My dear young lady, you would be safe in betting your life on that every time!" Old Sunflower declared.

"I am not at all afraid of your interrogations, and you can question as freely as you please."

"All right! I will go ahead then."

"First and foremost, what is your honest opinion 'bout this Frenchman—ain't thar a grain of truth in that thar young cub's declaration that the doctor got you to do this writing so as to have a chance to make himself agreeable to you?" the big Westerner asked, shrewdly.

A slight blush rose in the girl's pale cheeks, and she hesitated a moment before she spoke, then she said:

"I will not attempt to conceal the truth from you. I believe the doctor did arrange the engagement with me so as to have an opportunity to win my affections.

"I did not think so at first," she continued. "In fact, I did not think anything at all about the matter.

"He was an agreeable gentleman; writing is a congenial occupation, and then too I was glad of an opportunity to add to my income.

"I am quite a miser," she admitted with a smile. "But you see I have always had the idea that the time might come when if I had some money which I could afford to spend I might be able to gain some intelligence of my father."

"I see, I see! very nat'ral under the circumstances" Old Sunflower remarked. "And the doctor then has been trying to make himself agreeable—kinder paving the way so when he tells you that you ar' bout the nicest gal he ever struck, and he will never be happy if you don't become Mrs. Doctor, you will not be surprised."

"Yes, he certainly has acted in that way," the girl replied, a little confused and blushing deeply, yet still answering with perfect frankness.

"Now, miss, I am going to put a real delicate and searching question to you," the big Westerner observed in a very earnest way. "But if you think I am going too far you needn't answer it.

"It is important to my leetle game or I wouldn't trouble you," he added.

"I will answer it if I can," she responded.

"Wal, now, how do you feel toward this hyer docto? Is he jest the kind of man that you would be willing to travel with in double harness all the rest of your life?"

"To answer you honestly I must reply that I don't know," Camille declared after a moment's hesitation.

"Sho! bain't kinder made up your mind yet, I reckon?"

"Yes, that is the truth."

"He is a kind of an oily gammon sort of a fellow too," Old Sunflower remarked.

"A good talker, and a man with a heap of education—jest the sort of chap to make a good impression upon any one not used to the tricks and traps of this hyer deceitful world."

"He certainly has tried to make himself agreeable to me," the girl admitted in a thoughtful way. "And I presume that in the course of time, if nothing intervened to change the good opinion that I now have of him, I might come to regard his suit with favor."

"Yes, that is quite nat'ral," old Sunflower remarked. "But you don't want to do it. You must not let him git any hold on you, for I have an idee that this hyer doctor ain't any better than he ought to be, and I reckon that he ain't arter you because he has taken a real fancy to you."

"He is one of the cool, calculating sort, you understand, not the kind of feller to fall in love with a gal because he thought she war nice, and all that sort of thing." Old Sunflower continued.

"Oh, no, he is one of the kind who is on the make, and I reckon no gal, no matter how pretty and good she might be, would have any attractions for him if he didn't think thar was a chance for to make a stake out of the affair."

A look of surprise appeared on Camille's features.

"I cannot understand how he can possibly hope to make anything out of me!" she exclaimed.

"I reckon you have told the doctor this story of yours," Old Sunflower observed in his shrewd way.

"Yes, he was so kind, and took such an interest in me that after we had become well-acquainted I told him how it was I came to live in New York."

"I s'pose he kinder led you on, eh?"

"Well, yes, now that you call my attention to the matter, I believe he did," the girl replied. "But, really, at the time I was not conscious of the fact," she continued. "Now, though, when I come to reflect, I can see that if it had not been for his skillfully-put questions I, in all probability, would not have told him my story."

"No doubt of that!" Old Sunflower assented. "It was not a difficult job for an old and experienced man of the world, like the doctor, to get an innocent and unsuspecting girl, like yourself, to tell her story."

"Well, I did not think there was any harm in telling him; he seemed so kind, and so much interested in me, but I did not tell him though that I had a little money safely invested," she remarked.

"I don't exactly understand why I kept that back, for there wasn't any particular reason why I should conceal the fact, but I did, so you see he did not make love to me on account of my possessing a little money."

"I have a suspicion that this man knows something about your father," the Westerner remarked.

"Do you think so?" Camille exclaimed, immediately excited.

"Yes, but I am not sure of it, you understand; I am only making a bold guess."

"But why should you think that this doctor knows anything about my father?" Camille inquired, perplexed.

"Wal, thar ar' sart'in reasons which makes me think he may have known about the matter, but the way things ar' I can't explain 'em to you, and thar's one p'int in the thing which bothers me," Old Sunflower remarked in a reflective way.

"And that is how the doctor came to know who you were, for I have an idee that he didn't know your father by his name of Scarlett."

The girl was naturally bright and quick of apprehension and she immediately understood the Westerner's meaning.

"Is it possible that my father had two names?" she exclaimed.

"That is my idee."

"One by which he was known in Chicago and another which he bore here?"

"Exactly."

"That accounts, then, for the ill-success of my mother's search. And is my father alive and here in New York hiding under another name?" the girl demanded, trembling with excitement.

"Now keep cool! don't git flurried!" Old Sunflower remarked. "For thar ain't no occasion for you to git excited. Your father has gone the way of all flesh, if he is the man I think, and I don't reckon I have made any mistake 'bout the matter."

"He died 'bout five years ago; died suddenly, and that is the reason why no word from him ever came to your mother."

"Mind! I am not sure that this ar' man whom I have in view was your father, but I have a mighty strong suspicion that he was, and as it wasn't possible, as far as I kin see, for the doctor to have known that his name was Scarlett, I am r'ally puzzled 'bout how it was he came to know you were his darter."

"I bear a very strong resemblance to my father, and, possibly, that enabled the doctor to recognize me," Camille remarked, thoughtfully.

"Your father was a Frenchman?"

"Yes, but he spoke English as fluently as though it was his native tongue."

"I reckon I have not made any mistake about this thing, and if I have any kind of decent luck I will be able to clear up the mystery which surrounds your father's disappearance."

"Oh, if you will only do that I shall be so thankful to you!"

"I will try my best. But one thing we must be keerful about, and that is not to let the doctor suspect thar is anythug going on," Old Sunflower continued.

"You must keep on with him jest the same, but don't let him fool you with any love business, for he is a sharper and doesn't want you for yourself, but for what he expects to make out of you."

"I will be careful; I am still heart-free, and now I am warned I will be on my guard."

"You shall hear as soon as I find out anything!"

Then Old Sunflower returned to his own room, took his hat and hurried straight to the office of the superintendent of police.

CHAPTER XX.

IN COUNCIL.

OLD SUNFLOWER was lucky enough to find the superintendent in his office, and as he was disengaged, had an opportunity to hold a private conversation with him.

"I think I have struck something," the Westerner remarked.

"That is good," the chief declared. "It is plain that the withering hand of time has not rendered you incapable of doing good work."

"Oh, no; I may be a leetle disfigured, but I am still in the ring."

"Take a chair and go ahead!"

Old Sunflower seated himself, and then related the particulars of his interview with Camille Scarlett.

"Ah, yes, I remember the case," the superintendent observed, after the Westerner came to an end.

"Of course I could not do anything for the woman, and she seemed so sorrow-stricken about the affair that I could not find it in my heart to tell her exactly what I thought about the matter."

"You had a suspicion then that Scarlett was an assumed name?"

"Yes, that was my thought. I have come across some cases of the kind during my professional experience."

"The double existence business?"

"Yes, the man with two families."

"By the way, did Mrs. Scarlett give you a picture of her husband?" Old Sunflower asked, abruptly.

"Yes, I think she did. Do you want to see it?"

"I should like to, if it isn't too much trouble for you to get it."

"Oh, no, I have a place devoted to things of that kind."

Then the chief went to a closet, upon one of the shelves of which were piles of photographs.

"I have them filed away here in alphabetical order, so it is an easy matter for me to put my hand upon any particular one," he explained.

"S, that is what I want."

He took down the pile of photographs designated by the letter S, and turning them upon their backs examined the name written in a bold hand upon each one.

"Scarlett—Valentine Scarlett—here it is," the superintendent remarked, selecting a photograph, then returning the rest to the shelf.

Resuming his seat he placed the picture upon his desk so Old Sunflower could examine it.

It was the likeness of a man well in years, with bold, strongly-marked, foreign-looking features, the chin covered with a short gray beard.

"Humph!" ejaculated Old Sunflower, "it is jest as I thought. I have made a ten-strike, and spotted my man at the first lick!"

"That is good!"

"Jest take a look at this!" And as he made the remark Old Sunflower produced his wallet and took from it the picture of an elderly man with a beard, which he laid on the desk by the side of the photograph.

"By Jove! it is the same man!" the chief declared, greatly surprised.

"Oh, yes, there isn't any doubt about that. Valentine Scarlett, who disappeared so mysteriously, leaving behind him a wife and daughter, and Victor Grandville, who died hyer in New York, so suddenly, strongly supposed to have come to his death by foul means, were one and the same."

"I got this picture arter a deal of trouble, from a back number of an illustrated journal, which gave an account of the will contest."

"It is strange that I never happened to see a portrait of Grandville," the chief remarked musingly.

"If I had, the chances are great that I would have been struck by the likeness which the two men bore to each other, then I would have certainly made an examination into the matter and so would have discovered the truth."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly, but I got an idee how the thing was as soon as I heard the leetle gal's story."

"She is the very image of her father," Old Sunflower explained.

"You see, chief, jest as soon as I made up my mind to go in and do my level best to corral this hyer Frenchman, my first move was to git hold of a newspaper account of the death of the old Frenchman, and as I, somehow, got the notion that the pictur' might come in useful I cut it out and stuck it in my wallet."

"This discovery of yours fully explains the disappearance of the girl's father," the superintendent remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"Oh, yes; the Scarlett mystery is a mystery no longer. The knowledge that I possess of Victor Grandville's life makes the hull thing clear to me."

"The old Frenchman married a young gal; I reckon she must have been pretty good-looking at one time, although she isn't much more than a wreck now."

"Yes, you are right; she was a handsome woman five years ago."

"This hyer durned Frenchman ruined her life and took all the beauty out of her, I reckon. Metbe it was a just retribution though for the way she treated her first husband," Old Sunflower added, in a reflective way.

"Undoubtedly she deserved about all she got. It is a hard thing to say of a woman, but there is not much doubt about its truth," the superintendent observed, gravely.

"After the old man got his young wife, he found that she wasn't what he had expected," Old Sunflower continued. "And I reckon it must be a pesky ugly blow to a man to make the discovery that the woman to whom he has given his name doesn't care anything for him."

"Well, I should say so."

"Then, while smarting under the sting of this hyer thing, he met the other gal in Chicago, and the idea came to him to lead a double life. In New York he could be Victor Grandville, and in Chicago Valentine Scarlett.

"That is a queer conceit that a good many men have when they assume a false name to retain the initial letter."

"Yes, very common indeed."

"The game was an easy one to play. No one in Chicago knew him, except the men at his branch house, and, by taking a cottage in the suburbs, he escaped recognition. When he

came to New York, his Chicago wife thought he was traveling for the mystical tobacco company, and when he was in Chicago his New York people fancied he was attending to his branch house there."

"Oh, yes; under such circumstances a man could lead a double life for years without danger of the deception being discovered."

"And when the man was taken sick in New York, death came so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that he had no time to make any arrangements in regard to his Chicago family," the chief continued.

"I reckon he had made all his arrangements in regard to his brevet wife, so to speak," Old Sunflower remarked.

"You are thinking of the fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds which disappeared so mysteriously."

"Yes, that leetle sum was jest what he put away for his Chicago family."

"You see, he tried to do the square thing by both wives," the Westerner continued. "He divided his property pretty nearly in half."

"Yes, that is correct," the chief asserted. "But, I say: according to your story the girl hasn't got the money, and, in fact, has no idea that she is the heiress of any such sum."

"And thereby hangs a tale!" exclaimed Old Sunflower, with one of his peculiar grins.

"Jest call to mind the Chicago lawyer who, all of a sudden, manifested so much interest in the widow and the orphan girl."

"Yes, yes, he didn't trouble himself about the parties for nothing."

"Decidedly not! The average lawyer isn't built that way!" the Westerner asserted.

"Why did this fellow come?" he continued. "To see Scarlett himself? Oh, no! That was an excuse."

"Now, then, this is the way I have figured the thing out," Old Sunflower declared in his keen, shrewd style.

"Why does this Chicago lawyer want to marry the daughter? Because he knows there is fifty thousand dollars coming to her, mebbe more by this time, if the money was prudently invested, and he is anxious to get hold of it."

"You think, then, that the old Frenchman sold the bonds and invested the money in some way for his wife and child," the chief remarked, thoughtfully.

"Not a doubt of it in my mind!" Old Sunflower declared.

"And I think the chances are big, too, that this lawyer was the man who attended to the transaction of the business."

"Very likely, very likely, indeed!" the superintendent exclaimed.

"The investment was made in the name of the wife, probably," the chief continued. "And Grandville's idea was that if anything happened to him the wife would get the money all right."

"Exactly, he depended upon the lawyer, and the legal gentleman has played the rascal."

"It is evident, though, that he has not been able to get away with the property or else he would not trouble the girl with his attentions," the chief observed.

"The thing is evidently fixed so that he cannot get hold of it. All that he could do was to prevent the widow and child from knowing that the estate existed, and it is possible, too, that he has been helping himself to the income."

"Very likely."

"And, mind you, the Frenchman, this doctor, seems to be trying to play the same game," Old Sunflower remarked with a sly chuckle.

"Very true, indeed! He is making love to the girl and Montlac is not the man to waste his time in endeavoring to persuade a poor girl to marry him."

"Right you are! He is not that kind of a ha'rpun!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"Two facts, I think, ar' sart'in. First, the doctor knows who the gal is—he knows that her father, Scarlett, was Grandville; second, he reckons she is the heiress of the fifty thousand dollars, so I think I would be safe in betting a big lot of ducats that he knows jest whar the money is too, and calculates he kin git his paws on it, right quick, the moment he gits hold of the gal."

"Well, I think you have figured the thing out correctly," the chief observed with an approving nod. "But I regret to be obliged to remark that I don't see, from the present outlook, how we are going to nail the Frenchman, and that is the principal point."

"Very true. It isn't any crime for him to try and marry a girl because she has got money."

"No, if that was criminal there would not be jails enough in the country to hold the men to say nothing of the women," the superintendent declared.

"As you say, the main point is to put the 'collar' on the Frenchman, who is a thorough-paced rascal beyond a doubt."

"Oh, he is a keen one!" the chief declared. "To my thinking, you know, the odds are about a hundred to one that he poisoned the old Frenchman, but he worked the trick so skillfully that it was not possible for the law to get a hold on him."

"Yes, he is one of the kind whom it is an

honor for any man-hunter to nab," Old Sunflower remarked. "But though I am kinder old and rusty, and out of practice, yet I am going to do my level best to put this schemer behind the bars."

"From what I kin learn, his fortunes ar' at a pretty low ebb jest now. He is desperately in want of money, and it may be possible that in order to make a stake he will take big risks, and so give me a chance at him," the Westerner continued.

"I think he is working the bad-money racket," and then Old Sunflower explained how he had captured the ex-convict, Poodle Peters, and employed him as a stool-pigeon.

"Poodle ought to be able to do good work if he can be trusted," the chief observed.

"That is one line I have out, then if I can get hold of the wife, whom the Frenchman believes to be dead, but who is alive, and in the city somewhere, it will be another."

"My idea is that if the woman can be assured that she stands in no danger of being compelled to go back to the Frenchman, she may be willing to make a clean breast of all she knows concerning him."

"Well, I think that is very likely, but the chances are great that you will have a tough job to find her," the chief declared.

"Oh, I know that, for under the circumstances she will do her best to hide away from everybody; but for all that, I am building considerably on her," Old Sunflower replied.

"My chief hope, though, is in this girl, Camille," he continued. "I can see that she has faith in me, and what little I have already said about the doctor has aroused a suspicion in her mind that he is not jest exactly what he ought to be."

"My game is to git her to lead him on," the Westerner added.

"Yes, I understand, and I think the idea is a good one."

"And if I judge it is necessary, I shall not hesitate to tell her some of the particulars of this hyer mixed-up affair, so as to git her to do all she can to entrap this cunning rascal."

"When she finds that this doctor is the man who was accused of poisoning her father, the chances are big that she will do all in her power to aid me to bring him to justice."

"Undoubtedly! Your reasoning is correct in regard to that, I think."

"And if I can succeed in finding the wife, so I could bring her and the daughter together, the wife's description of what a rascal this Frenchman is would be sure to make the girl do all in her power to entrap the scoundrel."

"Yes, unless the woman has a guilty knowledge of the old man's death," the superintendent remarked. "In that case, you know, she would hardly be inclined to betray the Frenchman."

"I cannot bring myself to believe the woman was an accomplice!" Old Sunflower declared. "I do not doubt that she was frivolous and was weak-minded enough to flirt desperately with the doctor, but I am reluctant to think she could be guilty of planning with the Frenchman to put her husband out of the way, so she could get his money and be able to marry his murderer."

"Well, I rather think you are right about that," the superintendent observed, slowly.

"The woman was weak and vain, one of the kind who could be easily led by a stronger mind, but I think if the man had come right out and let her understand he intended to murder her husband, she never would have had nerve enough to have gone into such a scheme."

"That is my opinion, too!" Old Sunflower coincided. "She had no guilty knowledge in advance of what was to be done, but arter years had gone by—arter she had married the Frenchman, and he had made ducks and drakes of her money, and she had ample time to see jest what a rascal he was, the chances ar' big that in some stormy discussion he let fall some hints as to how Victor Grandville came to his death. It is very probable that he reproached her, said that if she had not led him on, he would never have committed the crime."

"The story of Adam and Eve over again—'the woman tempted me!'" suggested the chief.

"Exactly, but in this case the accusation was certainly unfounded."

"But I say, old fellow, you are speaking as if you felt pretty certain of finding the woman when the chances are decidedly against it!"

Old Sunflower grinned.

"Wal, I dunno 'bout that," he replied. "I didn't tell you about a little game I got up with the pawnbroker, to whose shop I tracked the woman."

"I figgered the thing out in this way: If she wanted to raise money on any other article she possessed, she would be more apt to come back to this man than to go elsewhere, and as I thought the probabilities were strong she would be obliged to pawn more things—for it is not an easy matter for a lone woman without friends to get work in a city like New York—I offered the pawnbroker a good stake if he would have the woman followed and trace her to her home the next time she came to his place."

"Well, that was a capital idea!" the chief declared.

"If the woman comes back, you can bet high the old Jew will have her shadowed," Old Sunflower declared.

"He has a couple of half-grown boys in the shop with him, and one of them will have very little trouble in doing the trick."

"You have your wires laid out all right, and I should not be surprised if you succeeded in nailing your man!" the chief affirmed.

"If I don't, it will not be for the want of trying," Old Sunflower remarked, as he rose to depart.

"I dropped in to post you in regard to how matters are going," he continued. "And, by the way, if you will give the boys orders not to molest Poodle Peters if they see him with any of the swell-mob, I will be obliged."

"You can give as an excuse that you want to be certain that he has taken to a crooked life again before you trouble him, for I don't want any one to suspect he is on the stool-pigeon lay."

"All right! I will attend to it."

"Much obliged!" and then the big Westerner departed.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE TRACK AGAIN.

AFTER leaving Police Headquarters Old Sunflower proceeded to Broadway.

"Lemme see," he mused as he walked slowly along. "Is it too soon to call upon that descendant of the Chosen People, who runs the pawnshop up on the avenue?

"It isn't a great while since the woman got the tanner on her watch, but ten dollars don't go very far in New York, and there is a chance that she may have gone back to raise more money."

"Anyhow, it will not do any harm for me to go up and interview that genial son of Israel."

"If the woman has not returned, my call will remind him that there is a stake to be made with very little trouble, for as he comes of a suspicious race, he may git the idee into his head that I don't mean business, and so neglect to attend to the matter."

Acting upon this thought, Old Sunflower took an up-town car, and in due time reached the pawnshop.

The old gray-bearded Jew was behind the counter and greeted the Westerner warmly, for the Hebrew recognized him on the instant.

"Ah, my tear sir, how you vas all der time!" the old Jew exclaimed.

"Oa, I am pretty well," the Westerner responded. "I was passing by, and I thought I would stop in and see if you had any news for me."

"Dot vas goot—dot vas der vay to do pisnees," the pawnbroker declared, wagging his head in an approving manner.

"We must be to der times up or we vill be left!"

"Yes, yes, you kin bet your life on that!" Old Sunflower assented.

"Vell, my tear sir, you vas in luck!" the Jew exclaimed, rubbing his hands together briskly and smiling blandly, just as though he took a great personal interest in the matter.

"That is good! The lady has been in then?"

"Oh, no, but mine son Jakey—he vas a smart poy, Jakey! You might pick out fifty poys in dis street and you would not find one dot vas as smart as Jakey!"

"Takes arter his father, eh?" Old Sunflower suggested with a grin.

"Aha! now you cracks a joke mit me, he, hel!" and the old Jew pretended to be greatly amused.

"Oh, yes, I am a pesky chap for a joke when you ketch me the right way."

"Dot vas goot! I likes me fun very mooch!"

"So do I; why it's bread and meat to me. And your boy Jakey did the business, eh?"

"Yesh, yesh! Jakey he vas out on der avenue, und dere he see der womans."

"And he knew enough to foller her I s'pose," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Yesh, my tear fr'en', der poy, Jakey, he follo' der woman to her house."

"He corraled her so he knows whar she hangs out?"

"Yesh, sir, der poy tracked her to her house—der best police spy in der city could not have done the work better, und I gives you mine word for dot."

"Wal, then, I reckon you ar'a ten-spot in, so trot your boy out."

"Yesh, mine fr'en'. Jakey!" cried the old Jew, and then the sharp-faced lad with the glittering, bead-like black eyes, which so strongly reminded one of a rat, made his appearance through the door in the partition which walled off the rear part of the shop.

"Dis vas der gentleman, Jakey, dot wanted to know apout der womans," the father said.

"It is all right. I 'piped' her off!" declared the lad, in shrill tones. "And I can take you to de house, right away, see?"

Although the boy showed his Jewish origin plainly enough in his face, there was no trace of Israel's ancient race in his speech, which

was that of the typical New York street gamin.

"Wal, now, sonny, I reckon that you ar' about as smart as they make 'em!" Old Sunflower declared, in an admiring way.

"I wasn't born yesterday, you can bet high on dot!" the boy replied.

"Do you hear dot, my tear fr'en?" the old Jew cried, in delight.

"I della you v'at it is, Jakey is one of der boss poys!"

"I kin take you to where der woman has her roost," the boy remarked. "But you will have to put up yer dust—that was the agreement, you know!"

"Mine gootness gracious! v'at a head for busi-ness dot poys has got!" the father exclaimed, in warm admiration.

"I vill bet me four tollars and a half dot you cannot find a poys in all der city dot can skin Jakey in a trade!"

"I should not be surprised if that was true," Old Sunflower remarked, dryly.

"Ten dollars!" said the boy, holding out his hand.

"Hold on, my young friend; ain't you a little previous in this hyer thing?" the Westerner asked.

"How do you make dat out?" the lad demanded, in a surly way.

"I was to give you ten dollars if you could put me on the track of the woman."

"Yes, dat is what you said."

"Dot was so; I can bear me witness to dot!" the old Jew declared.

"But I reckon I didn't say anything about paying in advance, did I, hey?"

"If I don't get de dust now, how do I know dat you will give it to me after I put you on the track of the woman?" the boy asked, suspiciously.

"You see, my tear fr'en, Jakey is right up to der times. Dot mans dot fools Jakey will hafte to get up very early in der mornin!" the father declared, with conscious pride.

"Oh, yes, I reckon that he is about as keen as they make 'em," Old Sunflower assented.

"And I reckon, too, that it would be a wise thing for an old hayseed countryman like myself to kinder keep my eyes peeled when I have any dealings with such a sharp chap, or else I may git skinned as clean as a whistle the first thing I know."

A look of disgust appeared on the faces of both the old Jew and the boy at this avowal, for they had not anticipated that their boasting would produce such an effect.

"Ah, vell, mine tear fr'en, you can depend upon Jakey to do shust v'at he says he vill do!" the father exclaimed, assuming his most persuasive smile.

"Oh, yes, I am on the square! I wish I may die if I ain't!" the lad affirmed.

"Wal, I hope you ar', but this is sich a pesky unsart'in world that I don't think I ought to take any risks," he Westerner remarked.

"I am a man of my word, though, and am prepared to stand by my offer.

"Jest you put me on the track of the woman, and it will be a ten-dollar note in your pocket, but I don't pay the money, though, until I am satisfied I am getting my money's worth."

"Do you t'ink I would cheat you?" the boy demanded, indignantly.

"Oh, no, but you may have made some mistake about the matter—mebbe got hold of the wrong woman, you know, and I am not giving up ten dollars without I git on the track of this one particular woman."

"Mine gootness! my tear fr'en, Jakey is too smart to make a mistake!" the old Jew declared.

"Oh, I have got the woman dead to rights! Dere ain't no mistake 'bout her?" the boy exclaimed.

"Seeing is believing!" Old Sunflower retorted. "In this hyer game I must have a sight for my money, and don't you forget it!"

"Neither one of you has any call to doubt that I will put up the ducats freely enough if I kin git what I am willing to pay for."

"Didn't I pay for the information before, and did I hesitate to shell out the cash?"

"Mine gootness, no!" the old Jew responded. "You paid over der monis like a perfect gentlemans!"

"And so I will this time if I git a squar'deal!" the Westerner declared.

"Have you got de ten wid you now, all right?" the boy asked, suspiciously.

"Oh, yes, sonny, not only one ten, but plenty more to keep it company! I will let you see for yourselves, and then you will be satisfied."

Old Sunflower produced his pocketbook and drew forth a goodly number of bank-bills, which he flourished before the eyes of the father and son.

"Mine gootness! mine fr'en, you must have as mooch as a t'ousand tollers in dot pile!" the old Jew declared.

"Wal, I have got enough, so I kin spare a ten-dollar sawbuck and not miss it," the Westerner responded.

"You see, young man, as far as the money goes I kin pay the ten easily enough, and as I

was prompt enough in shelling out before, you ought to be satisfied that you will git the money all right now if you kin do what I want."

"Oh, Jakey can do dot, mine tear fr'en!" the father asserted.

"You must not make any mistake 'bout dot," the old Jew continued. "Jakey met der/womans on der street und he knew her der moment he puts his sharp eyes on her face, und so he followed her, und found out where she lived."

"Take me to the house, and the moment I see that there isn't any mistake about the matter, the money is yours."

"Dot was right!" the old Jew cried. "Go along mit der gentlemans, Jakey! You can knock der door on und ask some fool question when der womans comes, so dot dis gentlemans can see for himself dot everyting is all right."

"I reckon that game will work," Old Sunflower remarked.

Then he and the boy departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BRACE OF RASCALS.

As soon as the door closed behind the two the old Jew hurried to the show-window, which projected into the street, and, thrusting his head into it, watched the pair until he ascertained they were going down the avenue.

He chuckled gleefully as he withdrew his head from the window.

"Dot poys, Jakey, is a jewel! he vill do der trick all right!" he muttered.

And then he turned to the rear apartment.

"You can come out, poys!" he exclaimed. "Dey are away down der street, und dere is no danger of their coming back."

Through the door in the partition came two under-sized, but stockily-built and broad-shouldered young fellows, dressed in coarse garments, much the worse for wear.

A man familiar with the different classes which go to make up the great city would not have had any difficulty in deciding just what kind of fellows the two were.

The local name for the class is "toughs."

There are a dozen or more gangs of young fellows in New York who have their headquarters in low saloons, from whence they sally forth to annoy and rob unfortunate pedestrians.

It is from this class of toughs that the crooks of the metropolis are recruited.

When a policeman interferes with their little amusements, and they are hauled before a court, each and every man protests loudly that he is a hard-working young fellow, and the officer simply "run" him in because he had a grudge ag'in' him.

And the greatest bit of amusement that any of these fellows can have is for six or eight of them to suddenly assault an officer, in some dark corner, timing the attack so that no relief from a brother officer will be likely to reach the assailed policeman, take his club away, tear his uniform into shreds, and give him a fearful beating with his own weapon.

Any policeman of the district in which the pawnshop was situated could have given the pedigree of these two men, for they were the reputed leaders of a gang known as the Square-toed Rangers, one of the worst crowds in the metropolis.

The taller and older of the two was known as Sodger Flynn; he was a prominent amateur pugilist, and got his name from the fact that when engaged in a contest, he "sodgered," that is, pretended to be incapable of "putting up a good fight," then when his antagonist, believing that he had an easy victory in his grasp, became careless, Flynn would go at him with the fury of a tiger.

The other was called Faker Larkins, because his favorite game was to prowl about at night until he encountered some well-dressed man who wore a handsome chain, thereby indicating that his watch was a valuable one; then Larkins would pretend to be slightly under the influence of liquor, get right in front of his destined victim, so as to stop his onward course, and, in a melancholy whine, beg for a nickel, as he hadn't "broken his fast" that day.

And it did not matter whether the man returned a gruff "no," and endeavored to pass on, or "went down in his clothes" for the requisite small coin, the suppliant improved the opportunity of catching the man off his guard to give him a violent blow in the face with one hand, while with the other he grabbed the watch-chain.

The man would be forced backward, leaving his watch and chain in the hand of the footpad, who would immediately take to his heels, and the stranger, as soon as he recovered from the effect of the blow, naturally followed in pursuit.

Around the first corner dodged the thief, and when the stranger made the turn he would run into a group of Larkins's pals, who would immediately manifest the most profound indignation at being so rudely treated.

The man would be immediately collared and an explanation demanded; during the confusion too some of the gang would endeavor to pick the stranger's pocket.

Then, after he succeeded in explaining what had occurred, the gang would release him, make profuse apologies for having detained him, and volunteer to assist in capturing the thief.

Of course, by this time the culprit had found a safe harbor in some tenement-house in the neighborhood, and the stranger, after an unsuccessful search, would be forced to go on his way, a poorer but a wiser man.

After this explanation the reader will understand exactly what kind of men the two were who had been in the pawnbroker's back room while Old Sunflower had been holding his discussion with the father and son in the shop.

The familiar manner in which the pawn broker spoke to the two is easily explained.

The master of the establishment was one of those unscrupulous men, to be found in all large cities, who did not trouble himself to ask his customers where, or how, they procured the valuables upon which they wished to raise money, provided he knew the parties, and understood that, so far as they were concerned, there wasn't any danger in doing business with them.

A stranger though would be put through a rigid cross-examination.

The pawnbroker was a "fence," as the receiver of stolen goods is termed, and if it were not for the "fences," who buy from the thieves their plunder, it would not be possible for the light-fingered rascals to dispose of the booty, therefore the police do their best to catch the "fences," but from the nature of the circumstances it is hard work to prove that the men were aware the goods were stolen ones, and then their system of doing business is so cunningly arranged that, unless the detectives are remarkably prompt in getting upon the right trail, the stolen goods are spirited away, or, if composed of gold and silver, go into the melting-pot, so it is not possible to trace them.

The reader will understand that these remarks do not apply to the great majority of the pawnbrokers, for the proportion of rascals in that business is no greater than in any other, but there are black sheep in every flock.

The detectives had had their eyes on the Jew for a long time, for they suspected he was doing a crooked business in a small way, but he managed his rascality so cunningly that they had never been able to trap him.

"Aha, poys, did you hear v'at dot mans said?" the Jew exclaimed, after the young fellows made their appearance.

"Oh, yes, you kin bet-cher-life we took it all in!" Sodger Flynn replied.

"We are the kind of coves w'ot are up to snuff!" the other young rascal declared.

"Why, blokes who know me well say I allers sleep wid my ears open," he added with a grin.

"Ah, my tear poys, you ought to have seen der roll dot mans has got!" the pawnbroker exclaimed, smacking his lips as though he was enjoying a delightful morsel.

"Ah, w'ot do you t'ink we are—a couple of chumps?" Sodger Flynn demanded.

"Didn't de Faker and myself peek t'rough de door and see der stuff wid our own eyes?"

"You bet we did!" Faker Larkins cried, with great emphasis.

"We are up to all little tricks of that kind, bet-cher-life!" Sodger Flynn added.

"Vell, my tear poys, I t'ink dot mans has as mooch as five hundred tollers—maybe a t'ousand in dot roll!"

"Oh, it is a good rich leather, and worth the pulling!" Sodger Flynn declared.

"And we are jist the boys who kin do the trick, right up brown, too!" the Faker exclaimed.

"Yeah, yeah, I know dot, my tear fr'en's," the old Jew asserted, rubbing his hands briskly together. "V'at a lucky ting it vas dot you two vas in der back room when der old mans comes in mit my shop, und I know you two poys, I knew dot you would have your ears open, und dot vas der reason dot I egged der mans on to show his monish. I had an idea dot he vas well-heeled mit der 'long green,' but I wanted to be sure of it."

"Faker and me kin work de trick to der queen's taste!" Sodger Flynn asserted, in a boastful way. "But I reckon it will take both of us to put the game through, for the jay is a big feller, and, although he is old, I t'ink he could put up a good fight if we give him the chance."

"Ah, but we won't give him no show!" the Faker ejaculated.

"We will jest wait until we kin git him in some dark place, and then we will come up behind and knock de stuflin' out of him afore he knows w'ot time of day it is!"

"Dot was good!" and the old Jew rascal rubbed his hands in glee.

"Und I say, mine tear poys, if you pull der leather all right, you will not forget your uncle's rake, hey?"

"Ah, we will give you a good divvy for putting up the job!" Sodger Flynn declared.

And then the two hurried away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHE IS FOUND.

AFTER leaving the pawnbroker's shop, the boy and Old Sunflower went down the avenue.

"Is it far?" the Westerner asked.

"Oh, no, only eight or ten blocks; I ain't sure jest how many, for I didn't count 'em, but I know the house when I come to it. It is a place where dey lets furnished rooms."

"Ah, yes, I see, and I s'pose this lady has a room there?"

"Oh, yes, I am jest dead certain of that, boss!" the boy declared.

"How kin you be?" Old Sunflower asked, in his shrewd way. "I s'pose you saw her go into the house, but that don't prove that she lives thar, you know."

"Don't I tell yer dat I've got der t'ing dead to rights?" exclaimed the lad, in an aggrieved tone. "Wot kind of a chump do you take me to be, anyway?"

"I follerder der woman into de house—come de sneak act on her, see?" he explained.

"She had been to de store for fodder, and I see'd her put a key in a door, unlock it and go in. Wot better do you want dan dat, hey?"

"You are a smart boy, Jakey, and I reckon that if you keep on you will have a chance to stretch hemp one of these days."

"W'at do you mean by dat?" asked the boy, angrily. "Do you mean dat I will be hanged?"

"That is about the size of it, Jakey!" Old Sunflower replied in a paternal way.

"You are too smart to be honest. You are bound to be a crook when you git big enough," he continued. "And one of these days you will git into a difficulty, then out will come a knife, or a gun, you will git away with your man, and be booked for the scaffold."

"You kin bet yer life dat I will die game!" the lad declared, not at all appalled by the picture.

"Wal, if that is the way you look at the matter, I reckon it ain't worth while for any one to waste words on you," the Westerner remarked.

"But you are young yet, and though you think you are awful smart, I reckon you will have more sense as you git older, for when you come to back up ag'in' the law, you will find that it is a good deal like a man running his head ag'in' a stone wall. The harder he hits, the more damage it does him."

The boy shook his head, as though he doubted the truth of this assertion, but he did not reply, only looking at the Westerner in a wondering way, as though he was puzzled as to what manner of man the stranger was.

By this time they had come to the end of the block, and the boy halted on the curbstone with the exclamation that his shoestring was untied, and, forthwith, he stooped and began to fumble over the shoe.

A peculiar expression appeared on Old Sunflower's face as he glanced down at the boy.

"You young imp of Satan! What trick are you up to now?" the big Westerner muttered under his breath.

"I don't doubt you think you are the smartest little liar that ever drew the breath of life, but thar never was one of your tricky breed yet able to pull the wool over my eyes," he continued.

"This is a leetle dodge to gain time—to delay our onward march, but what do you reckon to make by it, anyhow?"

And then Old Sunflower pretended to be interested in a carriage which rolled by at that moment.

It was a dashy-looking equipage, and the Westerner affected to gaze after it, open-mouthed with admiration.

But he was really trying to get a sly look up the street, and by means of this maneuver he managed to accomplish his purpose, and if any one had been on the watch they never would have suspected the Westerner was looking at anything but the carriage.

Old Sunflower had eyes like a hawk naturally, then, too, years of experience on the boundless Western plains had made him unusually farsighted, and as it happened that the two rascals came sneaking out of the pawnshop just as he cast his rapid glance up the street, he was able to catch sight of them.

"Ohol thar ar'a couple of nice-looking galoots fer a man to run up ag'in' on a dark night," he muttered.

"Were them two rapscallions in the pawnbroker's place while I was thar?"

"I reckon they were, for a fact. In the back room, I s'pose, and, mebbe, that was the reason why the boy and the old man were so anxious to git me to show my money."

"It was their game to find out if I had a good supply of ducats on hand, so that these rascals would know whether I was worth going for or not."

"And now the question comes up: is this blamed little rascal fooling me 'bout the woman? Has he seen her, or is this hyer all a trick to git me to a convenient place so these scamps kin git a good chance at me?"

"He said the house was on the avenue, though, and that 'ar statement makes the thing look straight, for if they were planning a trap, they would have tried to git into some dark side

street, so I reckon the boy has spotted the woman all right."

Old Sunflower's meditations were interrupted at this point by the boy's announcement that he was ready to go on.

"Go ahead, sonny!" the Westerner responded.

Down the street they went, and finally the boy landed in front of a rather dingy-looking brick house.

By the side of the door was a sign which announced, "Furnished Rooms."

"Here we are, boss!" exclaimed the boy.

"Come right after me."

"All right; I will knock at the door, and if the woman I want answers I will slip the ten in to your hand, and you can scoot."

"Dat will do. De door is not locked, so we can go right up."

"Sail in!" Old Sunflower ejaculated.

Into the house and up the stairs they went; the boy stopped at a door which led to a rear room.

"Dis is de one," said the lad.

The Westerner had a ten-dollar bill in his left hand as he knocked on the door with his right.

A moment or two of suspense and then the door opened, revealing the pale face of the doctor's wife.

"How do you do, ma'am?" Old Sunflower remarked, with a polite bow, at the same time extending his left hand to the boy, who was directly behind him.

The youngster clutched the bill, and then, with noiseless steps, retreated down the stairs.

The woman started in mingled surprise and apprehension upon beholding the Westerner, and it was evident from the look on her face that she recognized him immediately.

"Don't be alarmed, ma'am!" Old Sunflower hastened to exclaim. "I don't come hyer to trouble you. All I want is a few minutes' conversation, if you will be so kind as to grant me the favor."

The woman's face showed that she was the prey of conflicting emotions, but finally, she said:

"Well, as long as you have found me, I suppose I may as well comply with your request," and she opened the door so that he might enter.

"I can assure you, ma'am, that you will not have any cause to regret it," Old Sunflower declared, as he marched into the room, closing the door behind him.

It was a small apartment, scantily furnished, there being but two chairs.

The lady brought one for the visitor, and, when he seated himself, took the other.

"Now I want you to understand, ma'am, that I don't come hyer to trouble you," the Westerner explained. "I had the good luck to be able to hunt you up, but I didn't do it for the purpose of disturbing you in any way."

"I am glad to receive such an assurance," Mrs. Montlac observed with a deep sigh. "For I am sure I have had more than my share of trouble, and all I ask of the world now is to be allowed to live in peace."

"Wal, ma'am, I reckon, really, that thar ain't much danger of anybody troubling you, for it is my opinion that I am the only person who knows that you are alive."

"The little game you played with the boat completely fooled your husband, and the two scamps who live up the river."

"When they missed the boat they came to the conclusion you had taken it with the idea of gitting across the river, so they went in search of you, found the boat upset, and with a piece knocked out of her, showing that she had been run down by a steamer and they jumped immediately to the conclusion you had been drowned."

"Fortune then did favor me a little!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, the smashed boat satisfied them that you had gone to the bottom, and become food for fishes, but as I was up to all games of that kind, having done a good deal of detective business in my time, I wasn't deceived, and so set out to see what had become of you."

"I tracked you down the beach, along the railway to the station, and got hold of the conductor to whom you paid your fare."

"Then in New York hyer I was lucky enough to light on the very pawnshop where you got the money on your watch and chain, and so was able to trace you hyer."

"But why, sir, did you take all this trouble, may I ask?" exclaimed Mrs. Montlac in wonder.

"Wal, I was allers a great hand to work out any puzzle I run across," Old Sunflower explained.

"And then too I had got the notion into my head that I would like to have a talk with you."

"And now, ma'am, to come right to the p'int, without beating 'bout the bush at all, I will say to you that I consider this doctor-husband of yours to be jest as big a rascal as I have run across for many a year," the Westerner asserted.

bewildered, and it was evident that she did not know what to say.

"I reckon I am a leetle too hasty and abrupt about this hyer thing," Old Sunflower remarked.

"I have kinder pitched into it without giving you any explanation so as to prepare you for what I was going to say."

"Yes, it is very sudden," she murmured.

"Wal, it was jest by accident that I got mixed up in this hyer business," the Westerner observed. "I was sitting behind you on the train, and as I have got an uncommonly sharp pair of ears I happened to hear all the conversation between the doctor and yourself."

"In the beginning I wasn't trying to listen," he continued. "But arter I got an idee of what was going on I did my level best to git at the rights of the matter, and when I heerd that French rascal coolly agree to arrange things so as to give you a quick dispatch to the other world, I made up my mind that it was time I took a hand in the game; so, when you two left the train, I follerder on arter you, and arrived jest in time, too, for to stop your p'isoning yourself."

"The Frenchman cut up mighty rusty, and though I am a pretty old bird, yet he managed to take me unawares and laid me out with a pistol shot."

Mrs. Montlac uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"And it wasn't through any fault of his, either, that he failed to give me a ticket to the other world," Old Sunflower declared.

"His intention was good enough, and if I hadn't possessed an extra-thick skull I reckon I wouldn't be sitting hyer talking to you now, for I went down kerslump, and your rascal of a husband thought he had settled my hash for sure."

"He is a desperate man, with a soul which does not shrink from crime," she murmured.

"But I was not dead, only stunned, and recovered jest in time to have some fun with the old red-bearded Irishman, and the Italian. The doctor sent the pair to bury me, but I tell you, ma'am, they soon discovered that I was the liveliest dead man they had ever encountered."

"I pulled my gun on them, and they skipped like a pair of champion go-as-you-please fellers."

"They are a couple of miserable rogues, and until they became the doctor's associates I did not realize how low he had fallen."

"I follerder 'em down to the shore, for I was anxious to know what had become of you, but I couldn't find any traces, so I pretended to give the thing up as a bad job and went across the river."

"But that was only a blind, you know, to make the fellers think I wasn't going to bother myself 'bout them," Old Sunflower explained.

"You see, ma'am, when I git interested in a case of this kind, I am one of the kind of men who goes in to see it through."

"Jest as soon as I got in New York I made a bee-line for the chief of police, who is an old acquaintance of mine, and from him I got the pedigree of the doctor, so I am acquainted with the particulars of your first husband's death, and your marriage with this scheming Frenchman."

A shudder shook the slight form of the woman, while a look of anguish convulsed her features.

"Oh, the terrible past!" she murmured, in trembling tones. "What fearful mistakes I have made! If I only had my life to lead over again, how differently I would act!"

"Ah, my dear madam, that declaration has been made a hundred times since the 'rid began," Old Sunflower remarked. "But the mill cannot grind, you know, with the water that is past."

"Alas, yes; I know that it is but too true!" Mrs. Montlac declared, sadly.

"The only thing that a man or woman can do when they become satisfied that they have not acted as they ought to, is to lead a different kind of life in the future."

"Very true; and that is just the resolution I have taken," Mrs. Montlac remarked.

"On the train I was content to die, as you must be aware, if you overheard our conversation."

The Westerner nodded.

"I was heart-sick, and so weary of the world that I was quite content to leave it, and if you had not come so suddenly upon the scene when I had the poison at my lips, another moment would have sealed my fate."

"Oh, yes; I kin readily believe that. You were going to swaller the dose all right."

"I was wrought up to such a pitch of excitement that when the interruption came my o'erstrained nerves gave way under the tension and I fainted.

"When I recovered from my swoon, I found myself in darkness, and, from the closeness of the atmosphere, as well as the fact that the ground was under my feet, I came to the conclusion that I was in a cellar."

"Ohol! in a 'cellar, hey?" Old Sunflower ex-

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PENITENT WOMAN.

Mrs. MONTLAC appeared to be confused and

claimed, much interested. "Wal, that was the reason, then, that I couldn't find you although the houses were searched."

"Yes; in time my eyes became accustomed to the darkness so I was able to discover exactly what the apartment was like."

"It was not totally dark, for some faint gleams of light came into the apartment, and, after a time, I found that this light came through the cracks of a trap-door in the ceiling."

"Wal, wal, I want to know!" the Westerner exclaimed. "By gum! this is jest like a leaf out of a story-book!"

"By means of an old table I was able to get at the trap-door. It was fastened by a spring, and after a long search I succeeded in finding how it worked."

"The trap-door led into a shed half-filled with old rubbish, and there I found concealment until the darkness came; then, under the friendly cover of night, I escaped."

"It was a smart trick!"

"Before I fainted I was quite prepared to die—would, in fact, have welcomed death as a joyful release from a life of torture; but when, in solitude and darkness, I thought the matter over, my better angel cried out that I had no right to rush unsummoned into the presence of my Maker.

"If I had sinned, it was my duty by earnest repentance and a blameless life in the future to atone for the past."

"That is right! You struck the key-note that time!" Old Sunflower declared.

"And it seemed to me, too, that your unexpected appearance, just as I was about to take the fatal draught, was a warning from a supernatural power that my time had not yet come."

"Sart'in! I reckon that is about the right way to look at it."

"And then the desire for life grew as strong as had been the wish for death, and I made up my mind to do all in my power to not only escape from the apartment in which I was confined, but from the control of my husband."

"That was wise."

"Yes, for I felt that as long as I was in his power, and obliged to submit to his will, I could not hope to live as I ought to live to secure pardon for the wretched life which I had led."

"You succeeded in your design all right," Old Sunflower remarked. "Your husband and his pals believe you to be dead, and you need not have any fears 'bout my undeeceiving them."

"Oh, no!" the woman exclaimed, quickly. "I am not afraid of that, now I have had an opportunity to talk to you."

"I feel sure that you are an honest man, and are too noble to betray a poor woman who has determined to earnestly try to do what is right in the future."

"Your secret is perfectly safe with me!" the Westerner declared. "So don't you worry a mite 'bout that."

"I took the trouble to hunt you up because I thought you might be able to give me some information about the doctor," the Westerner continued.

"It is my opinion, you understand, that he is the grandest kind of a rascal, and I want to hunt him down if I can."

"I do not think I will be able to give you any information which would be of much value to you," she replied, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"He never had faith enough in me to trust any of his secrets to my care," Mrs. Montlac continued.

"Of course, from chance observations, which he unwittingly dropped from time to time, I suspected that he was engaged with men who were under the ban of the law in illegal enterprises, but I have no actual proof to that effect."

"True, a dozen times, at least, he has hinted to me that if I was not so inclined to be particular how money was made he could put me in the way of gaining large sums with very little chance of getting caught, but as I always declared I would rather die than acquire money by dishonest means he never fully explained the matter."

"How about Mr. Grandville's death?" Old Sunflower asked, abruptly. "You remember the suspicions that were entertained at the time in regard to the doctor?"

"Ah, yes, I recollect only too well," the lady replied with a mournful sigh.

"At that time I had the most perfect faith in the doctor, and scorned the thought that he was anything but the most noble and upright of men."

"You have changed your opinion now?"

"On, yes, bitter experience has taught me better, and now when I look back on the past I can plainly see how weak and foolish—really wicked I was."

"There are some extenuating circumstances though," she continued. "I was not much more than a child when I married Mr. Grandville, a giddy, foolish girl, and if I had had my own way I would never have married him, for in my

heart there was not the slightest spark of love for the man, but as I was a poor girl every one told me that I would be a great idiot not to make so good a match, and so I was persuaded into the union."

"Ah, yes, people who talk in such a way are responsible for a deal of trouble," the Westerner observed.

"Yes, that is certainly the truth. In nine cases out of ten it is a great mistake for a young girl to marry a man old enough to be her father."

"That is correct!" Old Sunflower assented.

"In my case, I thought what a fine time I would have after I was married, with plenty of money to spend, and as I had been denied the balls, parties and amusements which only wealthy people can enjoy, I made up my mind that after I was a wife my life would be one round of pleasure."

"But you did not calculate that your husband might not care for that sort of thing?"

"No, such a thought never entered my mind, but I had not been married long before I discovered what he thought about the matter, and when I found that he was not willing to give me money to spend as I pleased, and wished me to stay at home with him, a coolness immediately grew up between us which lasted until death dissolved our union."

"I will not attempt to deny that I was weak, vain and foolish, but not really wicked," she continued.

"I would have my own way about amusements and was always teasing my husband for money, so our married life was far from being a happy one, but as I was always careful how I behaved, and put on a good face toward my husband when in company, the world at large had little idea of how unhappy our married life really was."

"Then the end came and I was a free woman. My husband's relatives and friends made dreadful charges against me, and did their best to keep me from securing my husband's property."

"The doctor was about the only friend I had, and when I triumphed over my enemies it was only natural for me to feel grateful to him."

"And in time that feeling changed to a warmer one?"

"Yes, little by little he secured such an influence over me that when he asked me to marry him I gladly acceded, and then, after we were wedded, through his persuasions I became an opium-eater, and though I never was an absolute slave to it, yet I was reduced to such a condition that I had but very little will of my own."

"I reckon from what I have heard that you allowed the doctor to squander 'bout all your money," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Yes, gambling is Montlac's besetting sin, and the more he lost, the more eager he was to play, and so he threw away the money which was left me by my husband. Then he resorted, I think, to unlawful means to replenish his purse, but although I was almost a slave to him, yet neither by persuasion nor threats could he induce me to agree to aid him in his criminal enterprises, and this so angered him that he let fall dark hints in regard to Mr. Grandville's death, which filled my soul with horror, and this is why I was eager for death."

"But he didn't say anything that would afford a clew so he could be got at?"

"N-, nothing."

"By the way, did you ever hear of a man named Valentine Scarlett in connection with Mr. Grandville?"

"Never! the name is strange to me."

"Wal, ma'am, I reckon I hav'n't been able to make much arter all my trouble to hunt you up," the Westerner remarked, musingly.

"Excepting that you have confirmed my suspicion about the doctor being an extra cunning rascal, and satisfied me that I will have the toughest kind of a time in trapping him."

"I trust you will be careful not to betray my secret to the doctor nor to any one else, for I am now like one dead to the world and it is my wish to continue so."

"You can rely upon it that I will not say a word to any one 'bout you," the Westerner replied. "But I say, how are you going to git along?"

"I am an expert needle-woman, and can easily get work enough to support me," she replied. "And then as soon as I get money enough I am going away from New York, and in some small place remote from the great world, endeavor to lead a life that will atone for the past."

"Here is my address," and Old Sunflower produced a card upon which he penciled his name, adding care of Police Headquarters, Mulberry street. "A line sent to there will reach me at any time, and if you need aid don't hesitate to apply to me."

The lady thanked him and the Westerner took his departure.

"I am not making much progress," Old Sunflower murmured as he descended the stairs. "But I am jest the kind of man to keep on pegging away until I catch this slippery galoot!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ASSAULT.

THE interview had taken up considerable time, and when the Westerner stepped into the avenue he found the stores had closed, so the street was quite dark.

Old Sunflower hesitated for a few moments after gaining the street, as though he was uncertain how to proceed.

He glanced up and down, and then shook his head as if puzzled, but in reality he was bent upon discovering whether the ill-looking fellows, whom he had noticed coming out of the pawnshop, were in the neighborhood.

As far as he could see, they were not.

"Mebbe they got tired of waiting for me to come out and give it up as a bad job," Old Sunflower soliloquized.

"But that isn't the kind of game that these tough customers generally play," he continued.

"Time isn't anything to them, and, as a rule, they usually hang on like bulldogs until they can get a chance to take a trick."

"The odds are big that the pair are hiding in some doorway, and as soon as I set my trotters in motion they will be arter me."

"Wal, I am open for a bit of fun, and, mebbe, if the game comes my way, I will be able to make something out of it; so hyer goes!"

And with the word the Westerner started at a leisurely gait down the avenue.

He strolled along like a man deep in thought, apparently paying no attention to the surroundings, but when he came to the corner, where a well-lighted liquor store threw forth its cheerful beams, he hesitated, turned as if to enter, and then halted, running his hand down in his pocket as if in search of loose change.

This maneuver was to enable him to cast a quick glance up the street, which he did in such a sly way that it was not perceptible.

As he had expected, half-way up the block were two dark forms coming slowly along, apparently busy in conversation.

"Abal thar ar' my men, sure enough!" Old Sunflower muttered, as he drew forth some loose coins from his pocket and bent his head as if to examine the money, a dodge which enabled him to get another glimpse of the pair.

The two had halted and were apparently holding a busy argument by the curbstone.

"Now I will go in hyer and git a glass of beer, which will give these hyer two chumps a chance to fix tha' leetle game all right," the Westerner murmured.

Then he entered the saloon, called for beer, drank it and returned to the pavement.

He hesitated for a moment on the corner, then turned into the side street.

It was narrow and dark; in the middle of the block was a manufacturing establishment, with a large yard attached, wherein old wagons and various articles were stored.

"Obol this is jest the place for a picnic of this kind!" Old Sunflower muttered, as he got his eyes on the dark space.

The two fellows were now close behind him, coming on with almost noiseless footfalls.

"Both of 'em have got rubbers on, I reckon," the Westerner soliloquized. "And if that is so, it goes to show that they ar' old hands at this sort of thing."

"In a moment or two they will astonish me, I expect, or, mebbe, I will succeed in astonishing them; for you can't always most ginerally exactly tell how things will turn out in this on-sart'in world."

The Westerner was right in his conjecture in regard to the attack.

Five steps more he took, and then the two footpads sprung upon him.

But though their motions were almost noiseless, yet the keen ears of Old Sunflower detected the rapid advance, and just as the pair flung themselves upon him, he suddenly halted and dropped to the ground.

The effect of this unexpected movement was that both of the ruffians tumbled over him, not being able to check their movements in time to save themselves.

Then the Westerner sprung to his feet, and as Faker Larkins, who was the nearest to him and the first to recover from his stumble, assumed an upright position, Old Sunflower "let go" with his huge right fist, and the blow, catching the tough under the ear, sent him whirling into the street, where he stumbled and came down on "all-fours."

This one blow amply satisfied the Faker that he had "no business" with the brawny stranger, so he scrambled up as soon as possible and ran down the street at the top of his speed.

Sodger Flynn was game, though, and the re-pulse of his companion only made him more eager for the fray.

It was his idea that Larkins had been whipped by a chance blow, and the stranger could not settle him in that way.

So, with the fury of a tiger, he rushed at Old Sunflower.

It was an unequal contest, for the ruffian was not even up to the light-weight standard, only weighing about a hundred and twenty-five pounds while the Westerner tipped the scales at

over two hundred, all bone and muscle, too, with hardly a pound of useless fat.

And thus it happened that when the enraged ruffian rushed to the attack he was received in a style which surprised him.

It was a fatal error for a man so inferior in every way to attempt "lead off," thus laying himself open to a "counter."

Sodger Flynn's desperate blow only just grazed the side of Old Sunflower's head, as the Westerner deftly ducked to one side; but his ponderous right fist took the footpad squarely on the jaw and sent him over backward as promptly as though he had been shot.

The tough had been "knocked out," and it was fully a minute before he recovered sufficiently to rise to his feet, and then he staggered like a drunken man.

"Time!" ejaculated Old Sunflower, "squaring off" at his opponent.

"Come up to the scratch and take your gruel like a man! Thar's plenty more in the shop where the other come from!"

"I think I have got enough," the ruffian replied, sulkily, and so exhausted from the effects of the blow that it was as much as he could do to speak.

"Oh! you ain't spilling for a fight now as much as you was, hey?" the Westerner exclaimed, in a sarcastic way.

"It is all a mistake, anyway," Sodger Flynn growled. "You ain't the man I thought you was."

"I ain't?"

"No; you're a stranger to me."

"Sart'in!"

"So I ain't got no grudge ag'in' you."

"Of course not. Why should you have?"

"But the feller we was a-laying for was a tall 'un and about your size, only not near as big."

"And I s'pose you reckoned that you and your pal could have hammered him all right?"

"Yes, and we could, too. We have had it in for him for a long while."

"Too thin!" ejaculated Old Sunflower.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes with any ghost-stories, for the game will not work."

"I'm giving it to you as straight as a string," the ruffian protested.

"Oh, no; I know better, and you are only wasting your breath in trying to lie out of it!" the Westerner declared.

"You don't know me, and as I look jest like a country Jake, you reckoned you could pick me up for a flat without half trying; but you never made a bigger mistake in your life."

Sodger Flynn stared in astonishment.

"I am a reg'lar old rounder, you know, and I am as full of mischief as an egg is of meat," Old Sunflower continued.

"I understand jest what kind of a job you and your pal set out to work."

"You and he were in the back room of the pawnshop when I war there, and the old Jew war the man who put you up to the time of day!"

The ruffian was annoyed by this speech, but he was not disposed to own up.

"Oh, you have got the thing all dead wrong!" he declared.

"I have, eh?"

"Sure!"

"And you wasn't in the pawnshop!"

"Not by a jugful!"

"You are wasting your breath. I saw you come out of the place!"

"You did!" cried Sodger Flynn, who was at a loss to know what to say.

"You bet! When that little imp of a Jew boy stopped on the corner, pretending that he wanted to tie his shoe, I knew he was up to some game—I knew it was only a pretense to gain time, and I had an idea, right away, that, mebbe, somebody was going to come arter me, so I jest kept my eyes peeled for mischief, and that is how I happened to see you and your pal come out of the shop. Then when I left the house down the street, you two were waiting for me, and when I went on you came right along. I war up to your game from the beginning, but as I reckoned I could make something out of it, I turned inter this dark street so you could have a fair chance at me."

"The blazes, you did!" exclaimed the other, completely surprised by this unexpected announcement.

"Yes, that is the truth, and no mistake!" the Westerner declared, with a grin.

"You see, old pard, while you were putting up one job, I was putting up another," and the old fellow chuckled, much to the disgust of the discomfited footpad.

"Your job didn't go through, but mine did, so you see the luck is on my side," he continued.

"By the way, what is your name?"

"Sodger Flynn."

"That is a good handle! Wal, Sodger, I reckon we kin do some business together."

"I don't think I understand you," he said, slowly.

"Don't you? Wal, now, I reckon that is kinder odd, for I thought I spoke plainly enough. I said I reckon we kin do some business together."

"I don't understand you now any better than I did before," Sodger Flynn remarked, shaking his head in a puzzled way.

"But, I say, this hyer ain't no good place to talk business," the Westerner remarked, abruptly. "Hain't thar some nice, quiet gin-mill in the neighborhood whar we kin go for to talk this hyer matter over?"

There was a sudden flash of light from the tough's dull eyes, which did not escape the keen vision of Old Sunflower, then he pretended to be absorbed in thought for a few moments.

"There is a quiet crib down in Sixth avenue where we kin git a private room, and kin talk all we like widout anybody troubling their heads about us so long as we put up the price for the drinks."

"That is just the hole for us, then!" the Westerner exclaimed. "And the quicker we go thar the better. I mean business, you know; in fact, I am reg'lar old business every time, and I reckon that if you are the kind of galoot I take you to be, we kin come to an arrangement which will make money for both of us."

Sodger Flynn looked at Old Sunflower in a doubtful way.

"Maybe we kin, but I don't see how," he replied.

"You will understand all right arter I explain the matter," the Westerner rejoined. "So come along!"

The other hesitated and cast a look down the street.

"If you ar' looking for your pard, I reckon you won't see him," Old Sunflower continued. "From the way he left I should conclude he had the opinion that he had urgent business elsewhere, and was in a hurry to git thar," and then the old fellow chuckled loudly.

"The blamed coward!" Sodger Flynn exclaimed, angrily. "If he had any pluck he wouldn't have skipped out."

"Thar's no disputing that your pard had more prudence than sand," Old Sunflower remarked with the air of a sage.

"Still it must be taken into consideration that he got an awful clip, and out in the wild and woolly West, whar I come from—the Bitter Creek region—the boys allers allowed that I could hit 'bout as hard as a boss kin kick, and so I reckon your pard showed that his head was level by skipping out without waiting to git a second crack."

"He's no good!" Sodger Flynn declared in a disgusted way. "You kin bet your life that I wouldn't go back on a pal in that way!"

"Ah, yes, but you look as if you could hold your own in a scrap with any ordinary man, while your pard isn't built that way."

"That is true enough. He is a blamed sight better at running than he is at fighting," the ruffian remarked.

"Yes, he would cut a better figure in a 'go-as-you-please' than in a four-round scrap."

"A feller of dat sort makes me tired!" Sodger Flynn declared. "I'll give him the dead shake arter this, for I ain't got no use for a bloke of dat kind!"

"Have we got to take a car?"

"Naw! we kin walk dere in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"B'ilie in then!"

The two started, went up the street until they came to Broadway, and then proceeded down that thoroughfare, keeping on until they reached Sixth avenue, then Sodger Flynn led the way into one of the many saloons which abounded in that neighborhood.

It was a respectable-looking place enough on the outside, but when the Westerner passed through the screen doors, which were some ten feet from the main entrance, he found he was in one of the free concert halls which are to be found here and there on the main thoroughfares of the metropolis.

At the extreme end of the apartment, which was nearly a hundred feet deep, was a small stage, fitted up with scenery, and a banjo-player, dressed to represent an old negro, was endeavoring to entertain the audience, who were seated around the various tables, with which the room was filled, drinking and smoking.

"Jest keep right at my heels and I'll take you to de private room," Sodger Flynn said, as he and his companion passed through the swinging screens.

There was a door to the right, and as the two approached it, one of the bullet-headed, ruffian-looking waiters hastened to open it.

"Want a private room, gents? right down this way—what do you want to order?"

"I never drink anything stronger than whisky," Old Sunflower observed with a grin.

"I'll take whisky, too, but I want Scotch," Sodger Flynn remarked.

"All right! take de first door on de left!" said the waiter. "And I will be dero in a twinklin'!"

The passage was long and narrow, and at the

end were four doors, only a short distance from each other.

The ruffian opened the first door and entered, the Westerner following.

The room was but little better than a box, being only about eight feet square, and contained a table, four chairs and a lounge.

There was no window in the room and air was secured by a small square opening over the door covered with wire-netting.

There was a gas-jet pendent from the ceiling, directly over the table, which was in the center of the apartment.

The gas was not burning when the two entered but Sodger Flynn produced a match and lit it.

"There! we kin talk all we want to in this 'ere crib without any danger of anybody troubling their heads about us," the ruffian observed, as he helped himself to a chair, the Westerner being already seated.

"Oh, yes, we will be as snug hyer as a bug in a rug!" Old Sunflower declared with one of his broad grins.

"This hyer is a splendiferous place for business, and if a man is unfortunate enough to get full of bug-juice he kin stretch himself out on this hyer lounge and sleep it off."

"Yea, that is the idea, I s'pose. But these 'ere rooms are generally used by poker parties. Men who want a nice, quiet little game, you know, and who don't want to go to regular gambling-houses kin come in here and have all the fun they want; and as long as they order up the drinks regularly the boss of the saloon don't care what they do," Sodger Flynn explained.

"Oh, yes, this is jest old pie!" the Westerner exclaimed, and he cast as beaming a smile on the ruffian as though he held him to be the dearest friend he had in the world.

At this moment the waiter made his appearance.

"Two whiskies! the Scotch for you," he said, placing one tumbler before Sodger Flynn and the other by the Westerner's side.

"Tuirty cents!"

Old Sunflower rung a half-a-dollar on the table, and as the waiter picked up the coin with one hand while he ran the other into his pocket for change the Westerner exclaimed:

"That is all right! Keep the change to make your hair grow!"

"Thank ye!" the fellow replied, a broad grin on his face. "Come often!" Then he departed.

"Here's luck!" observed Sodger Flynn with a nod to the other as he took up his glass.

"Hold on a min'te!" cried Old Sunflower so abruptly that the ruffian replaced his glass on the table in surprise.

"I have jest got a queer notion into my head," the Westerner continued.

"I hain't had a drink of old Scotch whisky for so long that I have almost forgotten how it tastes, and I tell yer the smell of that 'ar fluid jest makes me hungry for it, so s'pose we changes glasses—you take this 'ar whisky and gi'n me the Scotch."

There was a gleam of suspicion in the eyes of the ruffian, then a surly look came over his face and he shook his head in a dogged way.

"Naw! I don't like any whisky but Scotch."

"Say, you give me that glass and take mine, or I'll split your breast-bone in twain with as little ceremony as though you were only a jack-rabbit!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, fiercely.

And, with the word, he whipped out a ten-inch bowie-knife from some hiding-place amid his clothes and menaced the rough with it.

Sodger Flynn was taken completely by surprise.

He was sitting squarely at the table, with his chair close to it and his legs under, so it was not an easy matter for him to move.

"What do you mean?—don't go to kidding a feller in this way," he gasped.

"Will you drink the whisky?"

"I—yes, but what are you acting like such a blamed fool for?" the ruffian exclaimed, in sullen anger.

"Oh, I am built that way!" Old Sunflower replied.

Then he shoved his glass over to Sodger Flynn and took possession of the rough's tumbler.

"Now, I'll give you a toast! Hyer's success to trade!"

And with the word the Westerner drained the glass at a swallow.

"Success to trade!" repeated the ruffian, in a mechanical sort of way.

And then, just as he got the glass to his lips, was taken with a violent fit of coughing, which resulted in the spilling of the contents of the tumbler.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the big Westerner, in his hearty way, as he returned the bowie-knife to its hiding-place. "You did that trick well! I had you in a tight place, but you managed to wriggle out of it."

"But, I say, old pard, you made a big mistake and a bad break when you thought you could ring any cold deal in on me, for I am strictly business!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PROPOSITION.

SODGER FLYNN was so completely taken by surprise that for a few moments he did not know what to say; finally he stammered out:

"What are you trying to get at? What is eating you, anyway?"

"Wal, you kin bet your life that you ain't, for a fact!" Old Sunflower declared, and then he laid back in his chair again and indulged in another hearty laugh.

"I ain't trying to!" the other responded doggedly and evidently very much out of sorts.

"Oh, no, of course not! you wouldn't be guilty of doing such a thing for the world!" the Westerner exclaimed in an extremely sarcastic way.

"I don't know what you are gitting at!" Sodger Flynn responded, endeavoring to assume an innocent look.

"Certainly not! you didn't try to put up a job on me! of course you didn't! You would not be guilty of doing sich a thing—unless you got a good chance! haw! haw!" and again the big Westerner laughed, hoarsely.

"You are not so smart as I thought you were, though, by a long shot!" Old Sunflower continued.

"Arter the first taste that I gave you of my quality you ought to have been satisfied that I wasn't any Jay from Jayville," he added.

"I'm from the West, but the man who picks me up for a flat will find out that he has made the biggest kind of a mistake! No game kin you play on me!"

"I wasn't trying no game!" the fellow declared in a sullen tone.

"Oh, no, nary game! You didn't bring me into this crib because you knew all you had to do was to 'give the office' to the waiter and then he would bring a glass of liquor with enough of a hocus-pocus drug in it to lay out the strongest man.

"You reckoned I would swaller the p'ison, then you could keel me over on the sofa hyer and go through me for all I was worth."

"That is a reg'lar fairy tale!" Sodger Flynn affirmed, doggedly.

"Cert! you'll bet your life on it, eh, and lose it every time if you did!" Old Sunflower retorted.

"If that whisky hadn't been doctored up you would have swallered it quickly enough, for you are not the kind of man to allow good whisky to be wasted when you are around."

"'Cos I met with an accident you ain't got no call to say that I put up a job on you!" the other announced, endeavoring to assume an air of injured innocence.

"Rats!" exclaimed Old Sunflower in an extremely emphatic way. "Come off! don't try to stuff me with any yarns! I wasn't born yesterday! I am an old rounder, and you kin bet your life that I am up to all the games that are going!"

"I suspected that you might be up to some trick when you brought me in hyer, and so I kept my eyes peeled," he continued.

"Oh, well, if you have made up your mind that I was trying to play a game on you I don't suppose it will be any use for me to try for to git you out of the idea," Sodger Flynn observed.

"Not a mite of use!" Old Sunflower retorted. "I have got you down fine! But I didn't try to stop you when I suspected what you was up to, for I reckoned you wasn't fly enough to ring in no job on me, and I thought if I let you see that I was as sharp as they make 'em, we would be able to come to an understanding all the quicker."

"Blame me if I know what you are driving at!" the other declared in perplexity.

"Say! this hyer is a mighty onart'in world, and things ain't alregs what they seem," the Westerner remarked. "Now, although I am from the wild and woolly West, and look jest like a country greenhorn, yet I kin take a trick when the time comes as quickly as any man that ever handled a 'jimmy' or swiped a 'loather!'"

Sodger Flynn looked surprised.

"But I don't work on the lines of them games at all," Old Sunflower explained. "I am a traveling-man in the cattle business, and when I am on the road I handle a deal of money, and if I should be so unlucky as to pick up two or three thousand dollars' worth of queer money it would not bother me a great deal to get rid of it, you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I see."

"And that is jest what I come to New York for. I am ready to pay out good' money for bad, provided I kin make a good trade and the stuff is enough like the genowine so I kin git rid of it without trouble. It has got to be up to the mark, you understand."

"Yes, but I don't see where I kin come in!" Sodger Flynn exclaimed.

"Why, it is as plain as the nose on your face!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Maybe it is, but I can't see it."

"I'm a stranger hyer in New York, and the men who deal in the stuff will be afeared to do business with me, 'cos they don't know but what I might put up some game for to git them in trouble."

"Yes, I s'pose that is likely."

"Now then this is whar you come in," Old Sunflower explained.

"I reckon you are pretty well known to the men who ar' on the cross, and if you went to the fellers who git up the queer stuff and said: 'Hyer, I reckon I kin use some of your flimseys, or brass, 'cos I have got a pal who stands a good chance to git rid of a heap, for he is in the cattle business out West, and has plenty of opportunities to plant the goods,' don't you think you could make a trade?"

"Oh, yes, I don't doubt but what I could."

"Now do you see whar you come in?"

"In course!" Sodger Flynn declared, his face lighting up. "There's no trouble 'bout me working a trick of this kind, only I ain't posted as to the men who deal in the queer."

"Oh, I didn't expect you was," the Westerner replied.

"Thar isn't much business in that line going on hyer in the East; thar's too many blamed detectives and Secret Service men 'round, and then too the people ar' so mighty well posted in regard-to money that it is hard work to shove the queer. Away out on the Western border, in the cattle region whar I operate, the case is different, and when a chap comes to pay over a thousand dollars, mebbe, in a lick, 'tain't sich a hard matter to ring in two or three hundred in the queer stuff."

"That's so! It could be done."

"Sart'in! the game has been worked a hundred times!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Wal, now, I am just the man who kin put you up to the time of day, and if you kin arrange it so I kin meet certain parties who have been recommended to me as making the best 'flimseys' that ever came out of a press I will come down handsomely with the ducats."

"It's a bargain! I'll do it!" the other exclaimed.

"That is what I was chasing the woman for," the Westerner explained. "Her brother used to be in the game, but he has skipped to England; but she give me the office 'bout a Doctor Montlac being in with a mob who were turning out extra good work."

"Yes, I have heard of the man, for he took care of a friend of mine who got a lead pill one night from a man he was trying to hold up," Sodger Flynn explained. "He said he wasn't afeard to call in the doctor for he was crooked himself, and could be trusted not to give the snap away."

"You kin find him then without any troublin'."

"Oh, yes."

"I will give one in twenty—a hundred for two thousand, if they ar' extra good. You kin make all the arrangements without saying much about me, until the last minute, when you fix the place to pay over the money; then I will come up with the solid stuff, and if you kin work it so I kin git a couple of thousand that will pass muster, I will gi'n you fifty dollars for your trouble."

"That is a bargain!" Sodger Flynn exclaimed, delighted at the prospect of being able to make fifty dollars so easily.

"It will probably take you a week or so to git the thing arranged all right, for the party may not have the stuff on hand," Old Sunflower observed.

"That is true."

"You see I want a pretty big sum, and if the ang know their business, and I reckon they do from what I have heered, they don't keep the stuff by them so the thing could be brought right home to them if the detective chaps should happen to gobble them on suspicion."

"I will meet you here a week from to-night, and in the meanwhile you can arrange the business so we kin meet the parties whar they like to make the trade."

"All right! I kin work the trick."

"My name is Flowers, by the way."

"And mine is Flynn—Sodger Flynn, my pals call me."

"Wal, I'm glad I run up ag'in' you!" Old Sunflower announced.

And then the two departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STOOL-PIGEON'S REPORT.

OLD SUNFLOWER "stood treat" before the pair left the saloon, and at the door they separated, Sodger Flynn going up-town, while the Westerner went through the cross-streets toward Broadway.

Old Sunflower chuckled to himself as he went on his way.

"I reckon I ain't making so bad a job of it arter all," he murmured.

As the street was deserted he was able to commune with himself aloud without attracting attention.

"But, even if I succeed in nailing my man the triumph will not be a very big one—not at all what I should like to have it, and what it really ought to be."

"I think the chances are big that the doctor did p'ison the old Frenchman, and he committed the crime in order to marry the widow."

"She is telling the truth, though, when she de-

clares that she had no suspicions thar was anything wrong.

"The doctor was too cunning to allow her to know his plans.

"He went ahead with the poisoning business because he thought he had taken the woman's measure accurately, and did not believe he would have any trouble in getting her to marry him if the old man was out of the way."

"After events proved that he had not made any mistake in regard to this, for he won the widow's hand without any trouble, but I don't see how it will be possible for me to bring him to book for that crime, for all evidence is destroyed, and nothing but his own confession could convict him, and he is not the kind of man to break down and give himself away."

"I can probably catch him on the counterfeit money business, unless he is smart enough to smell out the trap, which I don't think is likely."

"Thar is a chance, possibly, that he may try some game in regard to this girl, Camille, when he finds out he is not going to get her."

"I don't think thar is a doubt that in some way he has discovered she is Grandville's daughter, and probably an heiress to a good big sum of money, and that is why he is arter her."

"When he finds she is not inclined to marry him, he may be desperate enough to use force in order to get the girl in his power, and if he tries any trick of that sort I might be able to get at him."

"I must try to keep as good a watch as I possibly can on him," Old Sunflower continued. "For if I stood any chance to catch him on a more serious charge, I wouldn't push this false money business ahead, but if I see thar is going to be any opening in the other line, I can easily delay the purchase of the queer stuff for a week or two."

By this time the Westerner had reached Broadway; a down-town car came along, he boarded it, and in due time got off when Broome street was reached, going straight to his room.

And now for three days we must allow the wheels of time to glide away, for during those hours nothing of importance happened to any of the characters of our tale.

Old Sunflower from behind his closed blinds kept a watch upon the doctor's office. In time he was gratified with a view of the Frenchman, and so ascertained that he had not been deceived in regard to his identity.

This Dr. Montlac and the man who attempted his life in the lonely quarry glade on the Jersey shore were one and the same.

Camille had spent an evening in the doctor's office, working on his book, and duly reported to Old Sunflower all that took place.

She said the Frenchman was more attentive than usual, evidently doing his best to make a favorable impression upon her, but the girl, warned by the Westerner's words, was on her guard, and with the wit of woman, pretended not to comprehend that the doctor desired to make love to her.

Old Sunflower had not heard anything from Poodle Peters, whom he engaged to act as a stool-pigeon for him, and was just beginning to wonder what had become of the man when he made his appearance one evening about nine o'clock.

He looked pale, and the Westerner at once conjectured that he had been ill.

"You look out of sorts!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, as he waved the visitor into a chair.

"Have a little brandy?"

"Yes, I would be glad of it, and I think it would do me good," the ex-convict replied.

The Westerner produced the bottle and bade the other help himself.

Poodle Peters took a generous draught, and then smacked his lips and remarked:

"That is the real old stuff, and it goes to the right place!"

"Yes, sometimes a little dose of this kind will do a man a heap of good."

"I have a very bad cold," the ex-convict explained.

"Three years ago, in cracking a crib, I was unlucky enough to wake up a man with a revolver, and he put a bullet into me which I have carried around ever since, for the doctors were never able to get it."

"It is somewhere near my lungs, and whenever I catch cold I have a hard time of it. I don't doubt that bit of lead will be my death in the long run."

"It may work round so it can be got out," Old Sunflower suggested.

"Yes, that is what the doctors said," the man remarked. "But I don't build much on that. It is three years now since I got it, and it seems to me that as time goes on I am getting worse instead of better. One thing is certain: every time I catch cold I have a harder time than before, and that is what makes me think I ain't very long for this world."

"While thar is life, thar is hope, you know," Old Sunflower replied. "So you must keep a stiff upper lip, and never say die!"

"Oh, yes, I grin and bear it as well I am able."

"How have you got on—struck anything?"

"Certainly! you can just bet that I havn't been wasting any time!" Poodle Peters declared.

"I was like a drowning man when you threw out a rope to me, and you can depend upon my doing all I can to show you that I appreciate your kindness."

"That is the right way to act," Old Sunflower remarked. "And a man who shows that he appreciates help kin ginerally git it when he is in need."

"Well, I hope I will be able to show you that I am that kind of a man!" Poodle Peters declared. "It was not a hard job to get on the track of this doctor, for since he got down in the world about all the practice he has is among the crooks."

"You see, they don't fear to trust him, for they know that he is one of their own kind."

"He has gone right in with the crooks, then?"

"Yes, he is mixed up with a mob of counterfeitors, and he has also been connected with a gang of confidence men, also been concerned in some life insurance swindles."

"Been going the hull hog, I should say!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Yes, he has been concerned in a lot of crooked transactions, but he has also been extremely careful to keep in the background; and so, even when some of the swindles come to grief, the authorities have never been able to get a hold on him."

"O, he is an extra sharp rascal—that's no mistake 'bout that!" Old Sunflower declared.

"He is one of the kind of men who does the scheming," Poodle Peters explained. "He plans the job, then gets other fellows to carry it out; if the game doesn't go through, the men who are working the trick may be caught, but the boss in the background gets off."

"A very good scheme indeed," Old Sunflower remarked, with an approving nod.

"But I say, if the Frenchman is putting up the game in this way, he ought to be feathering his nest pretty well."

"They say that he pulls in a big stake every now and then, but the winning never does him any good."

"How is that?"

"Because he has got to be an inveterate gambler, and as soon as he gets any money in his pocket he starts in to break some faro-bank."

"Oho! no wonder he never keeps his money!" the Westerner cried.

"And what madness it is too for men to think they can beat gamblers at their own game," Old Sunflower continued.

"Even if the game is square, and that isn't one out of fifty hardly that is, the percentage is so heavily in favor of the bank that though a man may win once in a while, yet in the long run he must surely lose."

"Yes, but there isn't any madness in the world like the passion of gambling. Drink is bad enough, but it isn't as bad as when a man gets crazy on the gambling question, and they all say the Frenchman has got it in the worst kind of way. He studies out systems, you know."

"Ah, yes; infallible rules to beat the game. I have met men who thought they could figger the thing so they couldn't possibly lose, but, somehow, something about the calculation allers turns out to be a leetle wrong, and the game don't work; the player with his wonderful system loses, and the bank scoops in the coin, but, strange to say, when a man gits a-going in that way the fact that his systems don't work doesn't seem to have any influence on him."

"He allers argues that he has made a leetle mistake somewhar, and jest as soon as he discovers whar the mistake is, and fixes it, he will skin the bank out of its eye-teeth."

"Exactly! Well, Doctor Montlac has got an attack of that kind, and as you say, no matter how often he loses he is always confident that everything will go right the next time."

"Oh, yes, but that next time never comes."

"The man is crooked, no doubt about that, but I think from what I found out about him that it will be a mighty hard job to trap him," the conscript declared.

"You see, he works always in the background and puts somebody else forward to take the risk," Poodle Peters continued.

"Yes, I understand, and a crook who does business in that way is always a hard man to trap," Old Sunflower observed, thoughtfully.

Then for a few moments the Westerner was silent, buried in thought.

"I have an idee which I think might amount to something," he said at last.

"You ain't feeling well?"

"No, that is so."

"Suppose you call upon this doctor, tell him who you are—don't make any bones, you know, of explaining that you have been in trouble, and have jest come from up the river; so you ain't afraid to trust him with the secret, for you have allers heered him spoken of as a good, squar' man."

"Well, that is a fact," the other remarked. "All the crooks say that if a man gits into trouble the doctor can always be trusted to

patch up their wounds without giving the snap away, but he always puts in a big bill."

"It is policy on his part to keep quiet, for if he gave one of his patients away, the rest of the crooks would be sure to hear of it, and then it would be good-by to his ever picking up a dollar from any of them ag'in," the Westerner remarked.

"Oh, yes, with birds of that feather it is once caught twice shy!"

"The idee that I am going to work on is this: I have a notion that the Frenchman has a game on foot in which he may require the assistance of a man, jest like yourself," Old Sunflower explained.

"Now, when you come to him for treatment, stating that you are down on your luck, and ar' looking for a snap so you kin catch a few dollars, the thought may come to him that he could git you to do his work cheap."

"Yes, I think it very likely," Poodle Peters remarked after cogitating over the matter for a few minutes.

"And if he makes you an offer it is your game to accept it, no matter if the terms ar' low."

"I understand. Of course, when a man hasn't got a stake to fall back on he is generally glad to take up with almost anything that comes along."

"Oh, yes, and the doctor will figger the thing out in that way, I reckon," Old Sunflower observed.

"As I said afore, I think he has a scheme on foot by means of which he hopes to win a good-sized stake, but he has got to have assistance, for he can't run the game alone, and I think the chances ar' big that if you happen to come in his way, jest by accident, as it will appear, he will be mighty glad to rope you in."

"I shouldn't be surprised, and if the thing turns out that way I will be able to post you so you can nip the Frenchman just at the time when he thinks he has got everything fixed so he can't help pulling off the stake."

"That is my calculation, and if you can fix it so I can git the doctor, hard and fast, I will go a hundred 'cases!'

The eyes of the ex-convict sparkled.

A hundred dollars was no small sum to a man situated as he was.

"You will be apt to find the Frenchman in to-morrow night," Old Sunflower explained. "His office is right over opposite, you know, and you kin say that you happened to run across him jest by accident."

Poodle Peters nodded, and after a few more words of instruction departed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LETTER.

OLD SUNFLOWER had instructed Poodle Peters to report to him the particulars of his interview with the doctor, cautioning the ex-convict to wait until after nine o'clock at night before he came, and he was not to call until he was sure the doctor was not in his office, or in the neighborhood.

The Westerner had ascertained that the Frenchman was only at his office during certain hours of the day, but he was by no means regular in his attendance, and was only there at night during the two evenings when Camille came to work on the book.

As Poodle Peters had been posted in regard to this matter there was little danger that the doctor would surprise him either going into or coming out of the house.

Promptly at a quarter after nine, on the night which followed the one on which occurred the events detailed in our last chapter, the ex-convict made his appearance.

"Hello! you ar' prompt," Old Sunflower exclaimed as he pushed a chair to the visitor.

"Yes, I thought you ought to know how the thing turned out," Poodle Peters replied, as he seated himself.

"Did you pick up any points?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I did; that is, not to my thinking, but as you may be better posted than I am about the thing, perhaps you may be able to make something out of it."

"Go ahead, and let me hear what the Frenchman had to say for himself."

"I dropped in to see him this morning, and happened to be lucky enough to find him in the office. I came right down to business at once—told him who I was, and what hard luck I was playing in."

"Had he ever heered of you?"

"Oh, yes; he said I was well-known to him by reputation, although he had never happened to run across me before, then he made an examination, although I told him that I hadn't the 'cases' to pay him, but he said that was all right, he didn't stand on a few dollars if he could help a good man along, and I say, boss, the doctor knows his business, and I believe that if he would stick to it and let crooks and gambling alone he wouldn't want for money."

"Oh, I reckon there isn't a doubt about that; but the trouble is that he is like a good many other men, who would do well if they would stick to their own business and let other things slide; he wants a short-cut to wealth, and is not content to pile up the dollars slowly. Like the

monkey in the fable, in attempting to grab too much, he misses his chance to get anything."

"I think you are about right," Poodle Peters assented. "You know I told you I thought I was in a pretty bad way, and he said I hadn't made any mistake about the thing. My lungs are affected, and the principal trouble was from the fact that since I came from the stone boarding-house up the river at Sing Sing a couple of months ago I have been drinking pretty heavily. A man can always get plenty of liquor to drink, you know, even if he has to go hungry."

"Yes, that is a fact, and it is a mighty strange one, too; but human natur' is awful queer."

"It was want of good, nourishing food, with a surplus of bad whisky which had pulled me down, and he said he thought that if I would stop drinking and take good care of myself I would pull through."

"I told him, of course, that I would do the best I could," the ex-convict continued. "It would be an easy matter to let up on the whisky, but not so easy to secure good eatables, unless I should have the luck to strike the chance to make a stake."

"That was well put," Old Sunflower commented. "Such a statement as that gave him a chance to make an offer."

"Of course; that was why I spoke in that way—to give him a chance to bite, you know."

"And did he take hold?"

"Well, he did, and he didn't," Poodle Peters replied. "I suppose I might say that he bit, but I did not succeed in hooking him."

"Only nibbled, hey?"

"That is about the idea. He was silent for a few minutes, evidently thinking the matter over, then he said that he was working up a little game in which he might be able to use a man like myself, but it would be a couple of weeks before he would be ready to make a move, he thought; but he could let me have a tenner on account, and he handed out the chucks like a little man."

"Two weeks before he calculates to do anything, eh?" Old Sunflower remarked, slowly.

"Yes, that is what he said."

"Wal, it will give me plenty of time to git ready to check his little game, whatever it may be."

"I am to drop in to see him again in a week."

"Do so. By that time, mebbe, he will have things so fixed that he may give you a hint as to the kind of a game he thinks of playing," the Westerner remarked.

"Don't be in any hurry, you know—don't try to git him to speak until he gets good and ready," the shrewd old fellow continued. "Act as if you didn't give a continental what the game was so long as you stood a good chance to make a stake out of it."

"I understand! I shall not show any curiosity about the matter, and in time, of course, he will have to let the cat out of the bag."

"Keep me posted, and take the doctor's advice about eating and drinking. You let the fire-water alone, and you will make a man out of yourself yet."

"Oh, I have turned over a new leaf—you can depend upon that!" Poodle Peters declared, earnestly. "You have given me a chance to lead a new life, and I will never go back to the crooks again if I can help myself!"

And with this assurance the ex-convict departed.

"Durn the luck!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, when he once more found himself alone. "I don't seem able to push this job ahead, nohow! It is by all odds the slowest work I ever did."

"This Frenchman is a reg'lar distilled rascal, and no mistake," he continued.

"He is built a good deal, I reckon, on the style of the lively flea, when you go for to put your hand on him he ain't thar!"

"But I will nail him, though, in the long run, if I have to stick to the trail for a dozen years."

And the tone in which the Westerner spoke plainly showed that he meant every word of the sentence.

"I am opposed to an extra smart scoundrel this time. It is plain, too, that he is wonderfully cautious, and does not make a move without carefully calculating in advance all the probable consequences."

"It would be a feather in the cap of any man to get a rascal of this kind dead to rights, and so I am going to do my level best to take his scalp."

"I may not succeed, but I will be hanged if I don't make an awful good bluff at it."

Old Sunflower's meditations were interrupted at this point by a noise in the adjoining room.

He listened for a moment, and then said:

"Hello! the leetle gal has come in, I reckon."

A few moments more, and there came a gentle tap at the door between the two rooms.

The Westerner was seated near the door, so, knowing she could hear him, he called out:

"What is it, miss?"

"Can I speak with you for a few moments?" the girl asked.

"Sart'in! open the door and fire away!"

She drew the bolt, swung the door ajar, and

looked into the room, leaning against the door-post.

"I have a bit of news for you," she said, holding up a letter which she had evidently just opened.

"Go ahead!"

"I found this here when I came in a minute ago. I went shopping this evening, and so did not get home until now. The landlady had this letter for me; it came by the last mail, and it is from that old Chicago lawyer that I told you about," Camille declared, in a tone full of vexation.

"Sho! I want to know!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Yes, it is directed to me at this house," and the girl held the envelope up so he could see it.

"Now how do you suppose he managed to learn where I was?" she asked, in a tone of wonder.

"Some of your friends in Chicago must have told him."

"Yes, but none of them know where I am," Camille replied. "I was afraid that the old gentleman might take it into his head to come on here and annoy me with his distasteful attentions, if he could find out where I lived, so I took care not to allow any one in Chicago to know my address, with the exception of the lawyer who has charge of my business, and I was careful to tell him to be very particular not to allow anybody to know where I was, and I feel sure that he is too good a lawyer, and too much of a gentleman, to betray my confidence."

"Is he a prominent lawyer, with partners and clerks?"

"Yes, sir; there are three in the firm, and they have a large office—two or three clerks, I think."

"That is how the secret leaked out," Old Sunflower explained. "Your letter was filed so as to preserve the address, and some one of the clerks was rascal enough to give it away, for a consideration, of course."

"Yes, I suppose that must be the way in which he learned where I was," the girl remarked, plainly betraying her vexation.

"In this letter he said he will be in New York for a week or two on business, and he will have the honor of calling upon me as soon as he can find time."

"The old fellow means business!" the Westerner suggested, with a chuckle.

"I wish he would keep away!" Camille exclaimed, indignantly.

"Ah, yes, but we cannot always have what we wish, you know."

"I have half a mind to go away so he will not be able to find me!" the girl declared.

Old Sunflower shook his head.

"Why, I can do that easily enough!" she cried, evidently very much annoyed.

"Yes, that is true enough, but it is a question whether you would be able to avoid him, even if you went to all that trouble."

"Why, how could he possibly know where I was if I went to another house, and was careful not to tell anybody where I went?"

"My dear miss, you are a smart, intelligent girl enough, but you are not posted in regard to the tricks and traps of this hyer life," Old Sunflower remarked. "I take it that this lawyer is a shrewd, unscrupulous feller—a man who would be up to all sorts of tricks, and if he is that sort of a ha'rpin, he is not going to give you warning so you will be able to git out of his way."

"But how can he tell where I have gone if I go away before he comes?" Camille exclaimed, decidedly perplexed.

"By putting a shadow on you—a man paid to watch your movements—you understand?"

"My gracious! a light breaks in upon me!" the girl cried. "There was a shabby-looking fellow lounging around the store when I came out at six, and when I entered the house a minute ago I noticed just such another man coming down the street."

"That is the shadow, undoubtedly, and it is his business to keep track of you."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAN FROM CHICAGO.

For a few moments Camille stared in astonishment, and then her indignation found vent in words.

"Oh, this is monstrous!" she declared.

"Yes; it is a pretty tough game for a would-be respectable lawyer to play," Old Sunflower remarked.

"And the fact that he has condescended to do anything of the kind is proof positive that he is very much in earnest," the Westerner continued. "You see, he was able to make a close calculation as to the time when the letter was likely to reach you, and he reasoned that if you wanted to avoid him, you would be apt to get out as soon as you could after that, and so he put the shadow on the watch in order to be able to track you."

"It is perfectly outrageous that he should dare to do such a thing!" Camille exclaimed, her face flushed with anger.

"Yes, it is a mean, low-down game for any

decent man to play; but, between you and me and the bed-post, Miss Camille, I reckon that if you will let me have the management of this byer affair, I will be able afore the thing is ended to twist it around so that it will turn out to be a mighty good speculation for you, and a bad one for this Chicago man."

The girl looked at the Westerner in wonder, but there was something about the speaker which invited her trust, and so she said:

"I will be very glad indeed if you will take charge of the matter, for I am sure I do not know what to do."

"Thar is an old saying 'bout the engineer who was 'hoist by his own petard'—the blamed thing went off afore he could get out of the way, so he got the hull benefit of the explosion, and that is jest the kind of game I want to play on this hyer blamed lawyer," Old Sunflower explained. "He has put up a job on you, and now I want to turn the tables so he will find out that he made the biggest kind of a mistake when he went into this scheme."

"I will be guided entirely by your counsel," Camille declared.

"That is right, and if I have any kind of luck, I reckon I will be able to show this Chicago chap that it would have been money in his pocket if he had stayed at home."

"He is a nasty, mean wretch to persecute me in this way!" the girl exclaimed, indignantly.

"I reckon I will make him sad and sorry afore I git through," Old Sunflower remarked, with one of his peculiar grins.

"It is my idee, you know, that you will soon have a call from him."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes; he will time it so as to come right on the heels of his letter, in order not to give you any chance to git away."

"Now, then, Miss Camille, in a game of this kind it is necessary to meet cunning with cunning, and so, when this schemer comes, have him shown up to your room hyer, and do your talking in thar so I will be able to overhear the conversation."

"If I had my way, I wouldn't make any talk with him at all!"

And the girl's face flushed with anger as she spoke.

"Ah, yes; but, as I said, we must meet trick with trick, you know," the Westerner urged.

"If honest people didn't play the game in that way once in awhile they wouldn't stand no show to hold their own ag'in' the rascals who go around seeking whom they may devour."

"Yes, I presume that is true," Camille remarked, thoughtfully.

"Now then, what is this old lawyer driving at, anyway?" asked the Westerner, abruptly.

"Is he so much in love with you that he can't possibly git on without your consenting to marry him?"

The girl's lip curled in contempt.

"Oh, no, he is not the kind of man to trouble himself much about any woman," she replied.

"He is an old bachelor, they say, because he was too stingy to get married."

"What on earth is he a-running arter you for, then?"

"I don't know—I do not understand it at all," the girl answered with a doubtful shake of the head.

"All my friends in Chicago were puzzled to account for his conduct, but as to his being in love with me, I don't really believe the man knows the meaning of the word."

"It is a reg'lar puzzle, hey?"

"Indeed it is!"

"That suits me to a ha'r!" Old Sunflower declared. "If thar is anything that I am fond of, it is puzzles, and so I'm going in to solve this one if it takes all summer!"

The conversation at this point was interrupted by a ring at the door-bell.

"Mebbe that is your Chicago man now!" the Westerner remarked, with a grin.

"Oh, I hardly think he would come so late as this."

"Wal, when he does come don't forget that you must play 'possum jest now," Old Sunflower cautioned.

"Receive him as if you were jest tickled 'most to death—say how glad you ar' to see any one from Chicago, but if he goes in to make love, you must fight shy, you know."

"I reckon all you women-folks understand how to keep a feller on the anxious seat without r'all giving him a chance to decide whether you are going to say 'yes' or 'no,' and it would only be a waste of time for me to undertake to give you any p'ints in that line."

The girl laughed.

"Yes, I think I can manage the matter without any trouble, although I hate to descend to deception; still it will be a little bit of revenge for me to deceive him."

"Sart'lin and when you are contending with a rascal, it is fair to try all sorts of tricks to git the best of him."

At this point the sound of footsteps on the stairs was plainly heard by the two, and then came a knock at Miss Scarlett's door.

"It is somebody for you, b'gosh!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, as he hastened to close the portal, and then he took a position with his ear

to the keyhole so he could overhear all that passed in the other apartment.

Miss Scarlett opened the door; it was the landlady who had knocked, and she said:

"There is a gentleman at the door, Mr. Elijah Kembroke, from Chicago, who would like to see you."

"Oh, yes! an old gentleman?" the girl exclaimed, and from her tone one would have supposed the gentleman was a welcome visitor indeed.

"Yes, a gray-bearded gentleman."

"He is a lawyer who used to attend to my father's affairs!" Miss Scarlett observed.

"Ask him to walk up, please. Now I shall have news of all my friends in Chicago!"

Old Sunflower grinned and nodded his head in an approving way, as the words of the girl came to his ears.

"Ain't she doing it up brown?" he murmured. "And she is only a leetle slip of a gal, with no experience to speak of, I reckon."

"A young, innocent gal opposed to an old, crafty rascal of a lawyer, a feller, no doubt, up to all sorts of tricks and traps, a man who cut his eye-teeth forty years ago; but for all that, I reckon she will be a match for him; and how disgusted he will be if I succeed in working the game which I have in 'my mind's eye, Horatio,' as the gloomy cuss in the play remarks."

"He will feel like kicking himself all over this hyer big metropolis, if he has come for wool and then gits shorn; selah!" and the Westerner chuckled in huge delight.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PERSISTENT SUITOR.

In a few moments Old Sunflower heard the heavy footfalls on the stairs which plainly indicated that the new-comer was a man who carried considerable flesh on his bones.

"I reckon I must get a sight at him so as to have an idee what the old galoot looks like," the Westerner remarked as he heard the footsteps in the entry approaching the door.

By applying his eye to the keyhole Old Sunflower was able to gratify his wish.

Camille had opened the door and was in waiting on the threshold to greet the new-comer, which she did in a very friendly fashion.

"Why, Mr. Kembroke, this is an unexpected pleasure!" she exclaimed, shaking hands with him.

"Walk in, please, take a chair, and make yourself comfortable!" she continued, retreating into the room and placing a rocking-chair for his accommodation, taking care to set it close to the door which connected the two rooms so the Westerner could not fail to hear all he said.

And as the stranger advanced to take the chair Old Sunflower was enabled to get a good look at him.

He was a short, very stout gentleman of sixty or thereabouts, with a round, fat face, smoothly shaven, and upon his countenance was a constant smirk, one of those deceptive, meaningless smiles which some men affect.

"He is a sleek and oily cuss," Old Sunflower commented. "But I don't reckon that he has got any more sand, or backbone, than he knows what to do with, and when I come to put the screws on him, although he will probably yell and kick like all possessed, yet he will not be apt to make much of a fight, for he isn't built that way."

"How did you leave all the folks in Chicago?" the young lady asked.

"All very well indeed, and those to whom I mentioned the fact that I was going to call upon you here in New York sent their love, and expressed the hope that you would very soon make up your mind to return to the Windy City," the old gentleman replied in a soft, oily way, being very deliberate in his speech.

"Your call is a complete surprise, for I did not think that any one in Chicago knew where I lived."

"Ah, yes, you managed this matter very skillfully," the gentleman declared.

"It is quite romantic, this idea of yours, of going out into the world and getting your own living without being indebted to any one for assistance, but, despite all the care you took to keep your residence a secret, you see that a little bird took pity upon the anguish which I felt at not being able to either see or correspond with you and informed me of where you had hidden yourself away," and then the old gentleman chuckled as though he considered he had said something extremely funny.

"Oh, Mr. Kembroke, how you do talk!" exclaimed Camille, casting down her eyes and pretending to be confused.

"You wouldn't believe me in Chicago when I told you what a great impression you had made on me," the old lawyer continued. "But now, I trust, you will believe that I am thoroughly in earnest when you see that I have taken the trouble to come all the way from Chicago expressly to see you. Ah, my dear Miss Camille, I fear that it will not be possible for me to exist without I can have the supreme bliss of securing you for a life companion!" and then the old gentleman gave vent to a deep sigh which he in-

tended to be extremely impressive, but which was in reality quite comical.

"Oh, Mr. Kembroke, you must not talk in this way, for you make me so confused that I don't know what to do!" the girl declared, playing the part of a shy and embarrassed maiden with great skill.

"Ah, my dear Miss Camille, in the joy of once again beholding you, I cannot refrain from telling you how precious you are to me!" he declared. "I must relieve my overflowing heart! Only consider! I have taken this long journey, to the entire neglect of my business, expressly to see you."

"Why, you said in your letter that you had some affairs in New York which required your attention," the girl remarked in an innocent way.

"Ah, yes, I must admit that I used a little bit of deception there, but I trust you will be gracious enough to forgive me," he responded.

"You see, my dear Miss Camille, I was so uncertain in regard to my reception, for you always tried to avoid me when I spoke of love to you in Chicago, and I was afraid if I told you right out that the only business I had in New York was to see you, you might not be willing to receive me, but this kind reception makes me hope that the time may come when my ardent suit may be agreeable to you."

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Kembroke; I'm afraid I do not know my own mind," the girl remarked, in a hesitating way.

"But you will discover the truth in time, I am sure," the old gentleman urged.

"I can plainly see now that you have already changed considerably, and I feel correspondingly rejoiced," he continued.

"After you went away, when I fell to meditating upon the circumstance, the idea came to me that when you got here in New York, among strangers, it was possible you might regret that you had not been willing to listen more graciously to my earnest suit."

"Of course time does make a great many changes," Camille observed, in a reflective way.

"On, yes, undoubtedly," the old gentleman declared, in a tone of firm conviction.

"And on that fact I counted," he continued. "Upon reflection, too, I came to the conclusion that, perhaps, it was for the best for you to go out into the world so as to see a little of life, then your mind would be expanded, and you would perceive the difference between true and false friends."

"Yes, yes, I certainly have learned a great deal since I left Chicago," Camille admitted.

"Although ever since you left home I have been anxious to fly to you on the wings of love, yet I, with firm resolution, resisted the powerful temptation!" the old gentleman declared, with great dignity.

"No, I said to myself. 'Elijah, be firm! give this sweet, innocent maiden a chance to see something of this vile, wicked world, and then, when she tires of the turbulence and strife, perhaps she will be willing to seek the safe harbor that your ardent love affords her.'

"That, my dear Miss Camille, is just what I have said to myself fifty times at least since you departed."

"Really, Mr. Kembroke, I had no idea you could be such a devoted admirer!" Camille declared, with a glance full of coquetry.

"It is the truth—I assure you, upon my honor!" he responded, with a profound bow.

"But you must take the circumstances into consideration, my dear Miss Camille," he continued. "I am not a young man, although not old—in the very prime of life, you might say, but never until I was favored with the pleasure of your acquaintance did I ever encounter a lady whose charms were potent enough to win my admiration."

"Oh, my! that is surely a very high compliment for me; but I am afraid that you are a sad flatterer," the young lady declared, shaking her finger archly at the old, fat lawyer.

"No, no, it is the truth, I protest!" he exclaimed, with another elaborate bow.

"Really, you confuse me so when you deliver such flattering speeches that I don't know what to say," the girl affirmed, affecting a charming confusion.

"Believe me when I say I do not speak anything but the truth," the old gentleman protested.

"Ardent as is my love for you—strong as is my desire to have you return the passion which fills my heart to overflowing, yet I could not be guilty of an attempt to deceive you in any way."

"I have too much admiration for you to try any deception, and I assure you, upon my word of honor as a gentleman, that you can put perfect reliance in all I say to you."

"It is so nice to have some one in whom you can put perfect trust," Camille remarked, with charming demureness.

"You can rely upon me, I assure you, and I hope that in time you will come to the conclusion to reward my devotion by bestowing your own precious self upon me."

"Oh, Mr. Kembroke, I really don't know what to say; you must give me plenty of time

to find out just what I do think about the matter," the girl responded, affecting to be greatly confused.

"Why, certainly, of course," the old gentleman responded, with a very polite bow.

"Don't think that I want to hurry you! Not for the world would I have you hastily decide such a weighty question as this."

"You certainly ought to take plenty of time to make up your mind, and I feel sure that if you carefully think the matter over you will decide in my favor."

"There is considerable difference in our ages," she remarked slowly, and with an air as though she was pondering deeply upon the matter.

"Oh, yes, I am no boy, that is true," he responded, with a light and careless air.

"But, really, when you come to consider that subject in all its bearings I think you will come to the conclusion that the difference in our ages does not amount to much," he argued.

"I am a prudent man of the world, and if I were lucky enough to secure such a young, beautiful and accomplished girl as yourself for a wife, why, I should devote my entire time to making her happy; but you take the average young fellow now, as soon as the honeymoon is over, he prefers to leave his wife to mope at home while he goes to his clubs or puts in his time with the boys around town."

"There is the difference between the settled middle-aged man and the wild young fellow."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"And then, just consider the way you are compelled to live now," the old gentleman remarked.

"Is this wretchedly-plain apartment a fitting abode for a beautiful and accomplished girl like yourself?"

And he accompanied the remark with a profound bow.

"Well, it surely isn't a palace," Camille replied, with a smile.

"No, I should say not!" the lawyer exclaimed, with a contemptuous glance around.

"Now, I am not a rich man," he continued. "But, as I have always been careful and prudent all my life, and have had an excellent practice, I am pretty comfortably situated, and I can assure you that, after you are married to me, I will take a great pleasure in satisfying all your reasonable desires; in fact, there will be very few things, I fancy, which I will not be able to give you."

"Oh, yes; I feel sure you would be good to me; but you mustn't expect me to give you an answer now; you must give me time to think about it," Camille remarked, pretending to be very much confused.

"Certainly, of course. I wouldn't hurry you for the world!" the old gentleman protested.

"I trust you will permit me to call upon you while I am in town—twice a week, say—that will not be too much."

"Oh, no; I will be glad to have you."

And then the girl rose as if to signify the interview must end.

The old gentleman took the hint and departed.

Old Sunflower was prompt to follow him.

"I reckon I must have a finger in this hyer pie!" the big Westerner declared.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SHADOW.

OLD SUNFLOWER was too prudent a general to leave the house until he had allowed time for the Chicago man to get some distance away.

It was his conjecture that the old lawyer would turn to the left, for in that direction lay the center of the town, where the hotels were located, at one of which he would of course stop.

So, when the Westerner stepped outside of the door, he looked to the left.

The Chicago man was crossing the street, and had just been joined by a shabbily-dressed fellow, who had evidently been waiting for him on the corner.

Old Sunflower immediately recalled the description which the girl had given of the spy.

"That is the shadow, for a thousand dollars!" he exclaimed.

"I did not make any mistake, then, in my calculation that the old rascal would put a watch on her so as to be sure she would not get out of his way by changing to another house."

"Thanks to my instructions to the young lady, though, I fancy I have won the first trick in the game," Old Sunflower continued, with a chuckle.

"The agreeable way in which she received him has made the old fellow come to the conclusion that she has changed her opinions in regard to him since coming to New York."

"He thinks she is wavering in her mind, and so he stands a good chance to win her. I have no doubt, too, that just about this time he is laughing in his sleeve at the weakness of woman-kind, and flattering himself that by a little oily talk, and well-turned compliments, he has succeeded in making the girl look with a favorable eye upon his suit."

"B'gosh! won't he be mad when the explosion comes and he finds out he has been made a fool of—caught in his own trap, so to speak!" and again the Westerner chuckled.

By this time he had descended the steps to the sidewalk; he crossed immediately to the opposite side of the street, and then followed in pursuit of the two.

By this movement he rendered discovery impossible, for unless one of the two saw him come from the house they certainly would have no reason to suspect that he was paying any attention to their movements.

There were plenty of people in the street, so Old Sunflower was able to get right in the rear of the two, but on the opposite side of the way, be it remembered, so he could keep a good watch upon the pair without fear of his spying being discovered.

The two were proceeding along at a moderate pace, busily engaged in conversation.

Before Old Sunflower had proceeded a block, the suspicion came to him that the shabbily-dressed man was no stranger.

"By gum! if I hain't seen that galoot somewhar afore, I will be blamed if I ain't willing to eat him, provided his head is greased, and he is well salted!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"I can't git a good look at his face on account of his having that shockingly bad slouch hat pulled down over his forehead—that is done for a disguise, of course—but, notwithstanding that, that is something 'bout his figger and walk which gives him away to me."

"It is a mighty funny thing how good my memory is," he soliloquized. "Instead of gradually gitting worse—sort of failing me on account of old age creeping on—blamed if it isn't better than it ever was."

"I hav'n't been away from New York hardly long enough for a generation to grow up, but I have clean gone out of the remembrance of the old gang, yet, strange to say, so far I have been able to spot any one of them that I have come across, while every mother's son of a gun has been at sea as far as I am concerned."

"That is one of the old stagers over thar, I am willing to bet my life on it! And, jest as soon as the Chicago man quits him I will drop into the game."

Acting on this idea Old Sunflower kept up his watch until the pair reached the Bowery, and there the two parted.

Kembroke took a down-town car, while the shabbily-dressed man kept on Broome street, going toward Broadway.

"Ob! the lawyer is probably putting up at the Astor House," the Westerner murmured. "Good many of the old-timers act as if they didn't know thar was any other hotel in New York, so I reckon I kin find him, if I want him, but at present this hyer shadow is my mutton, and I will see what I kin make out of him."

Old Sunflower quickened his pace, and after proceeding a couple of blocks in the rear of the shabbily-dressed fellow, took advantage of the fact that the street at this particular point was dark and almost deserted, to overtake him.

The shadow, hearing the hastening footsteps behind him, naturally turned his head to see who it was; a man who pursues such a peculiar line of business is always suspicious and on the watch for danger.

Old Sunflower was only a yard behind him as he turned, and the Westerner immediately improved the opportunity to greet him in the most cordial manner, at the same time with a couple of vigorous strides of his long legs catching up with him.

"Hello, old times rocks! how goes it? I thought I knew your figger the moment I saw you, but I wasn't sart'in until I got a look at your face, but I reckon I would know that black scowl of yours anywhar!"

The face of the man was a rather odd one, and at the present time it most certainly wore an extremely ugly scowl.

The man's features were intelligent, strongly marked, and one peculiarity which he possessed would be apt to stamp his remembrance on the minds of all who encountered him. His eyebrows, which were jet black, were unusually heavy, almost meeting, and it was owing to this fact that his scowl was such an ugly one.

"I don't know you!" the shadow retorted, halting and glaring at the new-comer as if he resented the intrusion.

"Oh, yes, you do, and you neen't git mad 'bout the thing, anyway," Old Sunflower retorted.

"I tell you that you have made some mistake—I don't know you!" the man exclaimed in an angry way.

"Keep cool now, don't let your angry pas ion rise," the Westerner counseled. "It will not do you a mite of good!"

"I don't doubt that you believe you have got it all right and squar' when you say you don't know me, 'cos' that is the way I have found it to be with all my old acquaintances hyer in New York." Old Sunflower continued.

"Why, even my old pals go back on me, and when I grin at them they take me to be a perfect stranger."

"You see, the fact is since I went out West to grow up with the country, I seem to have

succeeded in growing out of the minds of all the folks I used to know hyer in York," Old Sunflower declared, with a solemn shake of the head.

"My memory is awful keen, though, and when once I get a good look at a face I never forget it," he continued.

"You have changed a good deal, I will allow, but that don't matter; I recognize you all the same, although I ain't seen you since the day when you were in the prisoner's box being tried for murder."

The man gave a start, and his face grew darker than ever.

"That is a lie!" he cried, hoarsely.

"Oh, no, it ain't, and you know it ain't, John Munell!" Old Sunflower replied, furiously.

"You see, I have got your name jest as pat as kin be."

"You managed to squeeze out of that scrape on account of the jury disagreeing. You had a smart lawyer, so he brought out the fact that you killed your man in an election row, and managed to show that thar was a mighty good chance that the man you shot would have shot you if he had been quick enough.

"You were a ward healer in those days; a pretty tough boy, too, and thar isn't a mite of doubt that if your political friends hadn't stuck to you like a lot of Trojans you would surely have been convicted of murder, and the chances are big you would have worn the hempen necktie."

The man was staggered by this positive assertion; he stared at the Westerner in a bewildered way for a moment, and then he exclaimed:

"In the devil's name, who are you?"

"Why, I am the man who snapped the handcuffs on your wrists when you stood with your smoking revolver and swore you would never be taken alive."

"Old Flowers!" the other exclaimed, in wonder.

"That is my handle, only since I went out West it has got twisted 'round a leetle, and now everybody calls me Old Sunflower," the Westerner replied.

"Well, what do you want of me, anyway?" the other asked, in an extremely suspicious way.

"Oho!" laughed Old Sunflower; "are you kinder skeered? Thar ain't a bit of use of your being, you know."

"That old affair is clean out of sight! Your case was pigeon-holed, you were released on bail, and the thing was never brought up ag'in; you kin thank your political friends for that," the Westerner added.

"If you hadn't been an extra-good healer, and a valuable man to keep the gang in line, you never would have got off."

"Yes, I had good friends, and they stuck to me, but that is all over long ago!"

"Oh, I know that! Why, if anybody should try to make trouble for you on the old charge, the chances are a thousand to one that they couldn't find enough ag'in' you to start on."

"All the witnesses are either dead or gone to parts unknown."

"Arter twenty years have gone by, it is mighty hard work to rake up an old case."

"I didn't have any idea of making any trouble for you," Old Sunflower explained.

"I happened to recognize you, and so I thought I would give you a hail for old time's sake. I don't bear no grudge ag'in' you, Munell, you understand, although I reckon you have a right to have it in for me on account of my slapping the bracelets on you in the old time."

"Oh, well, I don't know why I should harbor any ill-will against you," the man observed, in a reflective way.

"You were doing your duty—that was all. I would, probably, have done just the same if I had been in your place."

"That is the right way to look at it!" Old Sunflower declared. "I certainly treated you like a gentleman arter the darbies were on your wrists."

"Oh, yes, I hav'n't any complaints to make."

"What ar' you driving at now, by the way?" the Westerner asked.

"To judge by the looks of your togs, things ain't at high-water mark with you jest now."

"Ah! you can't tell by that. I am in your old business, the detective line, at present."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WAYS OF PRIVATE DETECTIVES.

"Oho! you don't say so!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"Oh, yes; not a regular police detective, you understand, but I have got a private inquiry office."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"We undertake all sorts of confidential business, you know," Munell explained. "Affairs which don't come in the regular criminal line, which the Headquarters detectives will not have anything to do with, seekers for evidence in divorce cases, looking after the habits of men holding positions of trust, and all business of that kind."

"Yes, yes, I see; them concerns have all sprung up since I went out of the business," the Westerner remarked. "But they have existed in England for years."

"Well, there are too many of them here now," the private detective asserted. "The field is overcrowded, and there isn't business enough for all of us."

"Old pal, that is jest the complaint that everybody makes in all lines of business. The fact is, this hyer world is gitting altogether too crowded, and we want four or five big wars to kill a few million of extra men," Old Sunflower declared, in the most serious way. "Then, you see, thar will be room for the rest."

"And it is on account of business being so dull that you find me rigged out in these togs," the other explained.

"A gent came to my office and wanted a little job done, and I was glad enough to undertake the work myself so as to save paying the cash out."

"That was a good idee!" the Westerner remarked.

"You ar' well got up, too," he continued, viewing the other with a critical eye.

"I reckon the most of your acquaintance wouldn't tumble to who you was in this rig, even if they were in the habit of meeting you every day, but the get-up didn't deceive me, although it is over twenty years since I saw you."

"Oh, well, you are a genius in that way, you must remember," Munell remarked.

"Ah, come off! I don't go to laying the taffy on with a whitewash brush!"

"I am giving it to you straight enough!" the other declared.

"When you were on the force here, you had the reputation of being the best man in the business, and I can tell you, Flowers, without laying myself out to give you any taffy, you understand, that when you arrested me that time, I don't believe there was another man in the city of New York who could have done it; but, somehow, from the way you came at me, I got the notion into my head that it wasn't any use for me to resist, for you were bound to get me."

"Wal, you were right thar," Old Sunflower remarked, in a jovial way, as though he was discussing some jolly picnic affair.

"Unless you were lucky enough to lay me out stiff at the first pop—and in a thing of that kind the odds ar' bout ten to one that you can't 'do' your man with one shot—it was a moral certainty that arter I got near enough to you to use my fists, you wouldn't git no chance for a second pull at the trigger."

"Well, I didn't make any calculations at the time, but, somehow, I got the idea that I had better yield, and I did so—almost, too, before I knew what I was doing."

"You were wise, I reckon, for you got out of the scrape in the long run all right, but if you had killed an officer in the discharge of his duty, the odds ar' big that you would have swung for it."

"Yes, not much doubt about that."

"I s'pose you ar' doing a leetle shadow act now?" Old Sunflower remarked, with another critical look at the other's dress.

"Yes, a little in that line."

"And is the Chicago man putting up the game?" the Westerner inquired, in an extremely matter-of-fact way.

"Eh!" exclaimed Munell, completely astonished by the unexpected question.

"Did the old fellow give himself away?" the Westerner continued. "I don't suppose he did, for he is a cautious old rat, and if you were willing to take the case without making any particular inquiries about him, the odds are big that he would not volunteer any information."

"Well, I am blamed if this don't beat the deck!" the private detective exclaimed, in profound astonishment.

"Didn't think I was enter the game, hey?" and Old Sunflower chuckled.

"Wal, I am, old pal, I am onto it, bigger'n a wolf!"

"And, I say," he continued, "if you don't know who your employer is, I kin tell you."

"His name is Elijah Kembroke, he is a lawyer in Chicago, and he is hyer working up a leetle game ag'in a young lady called Camille Scarlett, who works in a scurf house on Broadway, near Bleecker street, and lives down Broome street."

"You 'piped' the girl from the Broadway place to her home, and have been shadowing the house until the Chicago man came out a while ago, when you gave up the watch and came up the street with him."

The private detective drew a long breath when Old Sunflower came to an end, and he surveyed the grinning Westerner with a puzzled look.

"Kinder bothers you, hey? Ho, ho!" chuckled the man from the land of the setting sun.

"Well, I will be hanged if it don't!" Munell responded, in amazement.

"I am about as well posted in the game as you ar', hey?"

"Decidedly better posted, for I didn't know

who my customer was. When he came to talk business, his first question was if it would be necessary to reveal his name, and I replied that unless absolutely indispensable for the transaction of the business, he could call himself what he liked," the private detective explained.

"As far as I was concerned, Smith or Brown would suit me as well as anything else."

"And when you said that, he concluded to be close-mouthed, I reckon?"

"Yes, he said Cash would answer then well enough, as he intended to make his money talk."

"Mr. Cash, eh? Wal, that wasn't a bad idee," Old Sunflower observed, in a reflective way.

"But I say, I don't understand this matter," the private detective declared, evidently perplexed.

"It is kinder queer, for a fact," the Westerner admitted, with a grin.

"I suppose, from what you have said, that, while I have been 'piping' off the girl, you have been shadowing me!" Munell remarked.

"And I must compliment you, too, upon the way in which you have done the work, for though I generally keep my eyes open, and usually see what is going on around me as well as most men, I must say that I will be hanged if I saw you anywhere in my neighborhood today!"

Old Sunflower laughed, and then he said:

"Wal, that goes to show, old pal, that if you ever have a job on hand whar an extra smart shadow is required, it will be money in your pocket to hunt me up and put me onto the trick."

"Ah, I am afraid you are too big a man for me to handle," the private detective replied, with a decided shake of the head.

"But, say, what is this lay, anyway?" he continued.

"I suppose you are against my man, of course."

"I reckon I am."

"Well," the private detective said, in a very slow and doubtful way, "how comes it that you are willing to let me know how the land lies?"

"You are up to some game of course," he added.

"Oh, yes, you kin jest bet I am! I am as full of games as a dog is of fleas, and that is the kind of ha'rpin I am!"

"I say, old man, what are you in this private detective business for, anyway—the ducats?" the Westerner asked, abruptly.

"Of course I am not doing it for fur."

"If it is a fair question, what ar' you going to make out of this job?"

"I can't tell exactly, for it depends upon the length of time I am at it."

"Chargin' him by the day?"

"Yes, seven dollars a day."

"Wal, that ain't bad," Old Sunflower commented.

"You sartainly didn't go in to stick him much," he continued. "Now, then, s'pose I give you ten cases a day to 'pull the leg' of this hyer Chicago rooster!"

"Ten a day?"

"That is what I said, and you kin still pick up his seven, you know. You kin depend upon my working the game, too, so this hyer lawyer will never know that you have thrown the race, no matter how smart he may be."

The private detective meditated over the matter for a moment, and then said, abruptly:

"Well, I don't know why I shouldn't take your offer. I am in the business to make a living, and though, of course, it isn't exactly the square thing to take a man's money, and then sell him out, yet it is done every day by men who hold their heads up pretty high in the world."

"Oh, yes, no doubt bout that. And, if you want to, you kin kinder console yourself f'r acting in this way by thinking that this hyer old rooster would leave you, or any one else, in the lurch in a moment if he could make money by so doing."

"I do not doubt the truth of that, for from the little I have seen of him, I take the man to be a totally unscrupulous fellow, one who would not hesitate to try all sorts of tricks to make a dollar."

"Oh, yes, he is an old rascal, and that is another p'int you kin set up in your apology for giving him the 'cross.'

"In reality you are doing justice a service by throwing him down."

"I will accept your offer," the private detective declared. "But, I say, be careful to work the thing so my share in the transaction will not come out, for it would hurt my business if it was known I went back on a client."

"Oh, that is all right!" Old Sunflower responded.

"Thar isn't any danger of the facts gitting out; the thing will never git into the courts, you know, for it is one of those private snaps."

"The game that the old fellow is trying to play is this: he is in love with this Miss Camille, and wants to marry her."

"Oh, that is it, eh?"

"Yes, he was arter her in Chicago, where she comes from, but she didn't fancy the old feller,

and r'ally came on hyer to New York mainly for the purpose of gitting rid of him."

"Ah, yes, and then he came on here after her."

"Exactly! and he is so anxious to git the gal that I reckon he wouldn't hesitate to try any game which he thought would help him."

"Now I happen to be a friend of the young lady, and I don't intend to allow this old rascal of a lawyer to try any tricks, and I feel sure he will be up to some, for he doesn't stand any chance to git the gal unless he can contrive to put her in such a position that she will be forced to marry him."

"I understand," and the private detective nodded his head significantly.

"I think I can give you a pointer in regard to that," Munell continued.

"The work I have in hand to-morrow is to find out all I can about the foreman of the shop where the girl works—what sort of a man he is, and if a few dollars would be any inducement for him to do a little piece of work slightly off-color."

"Oho! he is up to some game for a dead sartinty!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Well, shall I go ahead?"

"Of course, jest the same as if I hadn't stuck my finger in the pie."

"Only keep you posted as to how the game goes on, eh?"

"That is it—that is the way to work it," Old Sunflower replied.

"He kin plot and plan all be likes, but jest so long as I am posted in regard to the tricks he is up to, it will be an easy matter for me to twist things around so he will not be able to make anything, no matter how cunning he is."

"All right! I will do the job up in prime style. He is to come to my office on Broadway to-morrow night at eight o'clock to receive my report; suppose you lie in wait, and when he goes out you come in!"

"Good as wheat!" the Westerner ejaculated.

"Here is my card," and Munell gave Old Sunflower the bit of pasteboard.

"I'll be on hand to-morrow night!"

And then the two separated.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SETTING THE TRAP.

OLD SUNFLOWER'S thoughts were extremely pleasant ones as he slowly retraced his steps toward the Bowery.

"Thar, I reckon I have fixed that business up in apple-pie order!" he declared.

"As a sporting man would say, 'things ar' sart'inly coming my way now!' As matters look it certainly appears as if I will be able to get this Chicago lawyer in a bad box afore he is many hours older."

"I reckon I know what his game is with the foreman of the scarf place, and if I am correct in my calculation I will fix it so that when he is bought, if the detective succeeds in arranging the matter, a man about my size will be somewhat in the neighborhood, and so fixed that none of the conversation will be lost."

"Lemme see!"

By this time Old Sunflower had got to the Bowery, and he halted on the corner for a moment to meditate.

"Isn't it 'bout time for that Sodger Flynn to make some kind of a report?" he mused.

"It seems to me that it is, and it will not do any harm, anyway, for me to take a trip up to Sixth avenue so as to see what he has got to say for himself."

Acting on this idea the Westerner went uptown by the L road and then took a horse-car across to Sixth avenue.

Although it was nearly eleven o'clock when Old Sunflower reached the saloon, yet he found the place well-filled with people.

At one of the tables nearest to the door, sat the two ruffians, Sodger Flynn and Faker Larkins.

Faker's face still showed the marks of Old Sunflower's iron-like fist, and he greeted the Westerner with an ugly scowl, as the new-comer advanced to the table, grinning as good-naturedly as though the pair were the dearest friends he had in the world.

"Hello, chaps! how ar' ye?" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "Bring us three beers," he continued, to the waiter, and then he took his seat at the table.

"This hyer is a friend of yours, I reckon," he said to Sodger Flynn, and nodding to Faker Larkins as he spoke.

"Ain't very well, is he? eat something that disagreed with him, I reckon, fer if he hadn't he wouldn't pull no sich mug as that."

"Why don't you smile and look pleasant, like as if you were tickled to death to see me?" he added, as the rough continued to scowl at him.

"Say, git a smile on you, right away, or I'll take you by the throat and bump your thick head ag'in the wall until you reckon that you have been sent for and can't come!" ejaculated the Westerner, with sudden fierceness, but speaking in so low a tone that the words only reached the ears of the two at the table.

Faker was anything but "game," and the

throat cowed him at once: the scowl vanished and was replaced by a glastry grin.

"That is better!" Old Sunflower remarked, in an approving manner. "But you would never take any prize at a beauty show, nowow."

The beer arrived at this moment, and the three proceeded to sample it.

"Wal, did you succeed in doing anything 'bout that leetle business I mentioned t'other day?" the Westerner asked, in a careless way.

"Oh, yes, I think I have got it fixed all right," Sodger Flynn replied.

"That is good," and then the Westerner cast a glance at Faker Larkins, and then another at Flynn.

The latter ruffian understood the meaning of the glances.

"Oh, dat is all right," he said. "Faker is in de snap. If it hadn't been for him, I couldn't have worked it."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; when I hunted de parties up, I found dat dey were de skeeriest crowd dat I ever struck! As it happened I didn't know none of dem, and de blokes wasn't willing to do any business wid me, and jest at dat time Faker happened to turn up, and den everyt'ing was lovely, for dey were into him, you know, and dey said dat whatever he said goes!"

"That was lucky," Old Sunflower observed. "It's mighty handy to have a friend round once in a while."

"You bet yer life on dat!" Sodger Flynn declared. "I couldn't have done a t'ing widout Faker, so you will have to let him into de snap."

"That is all right!" the Westerner replied. "I hav'n't any objections. I am not the man to kick about a little thing like that."

"You will find dat Faker here is one of de right sort," Sodger Flynn asserted.

"Wal, I am glad to hear it, for that is the kind of men I want to do business with," Old Sunflower responded.

"You see, de way we worked de t'ing was dat Faker said dat I was all right, and I gave de blokes de word dat you was as square as they make 'em!" Sodger Flynn explained.

"Ah, yes, they will find I am a furst-class man to do business with, if they ar' prepared to give me a good trade."

"Well, de blokes fought mighty shy at first, but when I told 'em dat you was prepared to put up de solid cash and wanted two or three t'ousand dollars' worth of stuff, it kinder made dem open their eyes."

"I don't doubt it," the Westerner responded. "It isn't often that they strike a customer who is willing to go in deep."

"But I am no leetle two-cent man, I want you to understand," Old Sunflower continued. "Out in the West whar I come from we do business on a large scale, and if these men have got the sand to ante up, we kin do a good trade."

"Dey kicked like steers ag'in de terms," Sodger Flynn observed.

"What was the matter with them?" the Westerner exclaimed, apparently astonished.

"Dey didn't think dat one in ten was enuff, you know."

"Wal, they ought to be satisfied with that when it comes to dealing in thousands: 'tain't like as if I was only going to take a couple of hundreds."

"Dat is jest what I told 'em," Sodger Flynn declared.

"I sed to 'em, 'Holy geel what do you want, the earth?' didn't I, Faker?"

"You bet! dat is de way you put it," the other exclaimed.

"But arter I give a big talk for 'bout half an hour, going for 'em like a Dutch uncle, you know, they finally concluded that if you would take two t'ousand dey would let you have it at dat rate."

"That is good!" Old Sunflower declared. "I kin see that I didn't make any mistake when I got you to fix [up] this hyer business.—Bring us some more beer!" this to a passing waiter.

"Oh, I ain't no clump when it comes to a deal!" Sodger Flynn declared, proudly. "And Faker here too put in a lot of taffy for to help de thing along."

"That's good! I reckon it was a lucky thing for me that I struck you two."

And then the Westerner indulged in one of his peculiar grins.

The pair looked at each other a little doubtfully, for they had an idea that the stranger was guyng them.

"Hyer's the beer, and we'll drink success to our trade," Old Sunflower remarked.

They all indulged in the liquid refreshment, and then Sodger Flynn said:

"By the way, boss, how did you happen to hear dat dere was a Frenchman running de t'ing?"

"Oh, I dunno exactly," Old Sunflower replied, in an evasive way. "I dunno as that is one of the things that I kin afford to give away."

"Well, I kin give you a pointer right now bout dat!" the tough declared.

"When you come to talk to dese blokes, you

don't want to say nothing 'bout no Frenchman, 'cos if you do you won't be able to do any business with them."

"You don't mean it!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Cert! I am giving you the straight tip every time, hey, Faker?"

"Dat's so," the other assented. "I don't know what was de matter, but when Sodger here happened to say something 'bout a Frenchman being the boss of the gang, the three blokes looked at each other like as if dey t'ought dat we was going to break dem all up."

"I am pretty fly, you know, and I see'd in a minute dat I had put my foot in it," Sodger Flynn explained. "And so I jest made a break for to git out as soon as I could."

"I turned right round to Faker here and sed, 'Dat is what you sed, wasn't it—dat I must do business wid de Frenchman?'"

"And I see'd dat Sodger was in a hole, and so I went in for to help him out," Faker Larkins interposed at this point.

"So I jest said, 'Now, what is biting you, anyway? I didn't say nothing 'bout no Frenchman. I told you dat I knowed a Frenchman once who made a big stake shoving de queer, dat was all!'"

"And that explanation satisfied them, I suppose," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Oh, yes, dey didn't have no suspicion dat Faker was putting up a job on them," Sodger Flynn observed.

"Who ar' the parties?" the Westerner asked.

"Mebbe 'tain't the gang that I expected to do business with."

"Oh, yes, I think it is, and you kin bet de Frenchman is in it too, but dey don't want dat to leak out, and dat is why dey had de shakes when I let de cat out of de bag."

"Dis is de only crowd dat I ever heered of dat made a reg'lar business of gitting up de stuff," Faker observed. "And dey ain't been at it over two or three years."

"Describe 'em!" said the Westerner.

"Well, dere's a big red-bearded Irishman—a reg'lar Mick, dat de odders call Paudeen," Sodger Flynn said. "Den a little Dago, named Ginney, I spose, for dat is all de rest called him, and an old gray-headed, gray-bearded son-of-a-gun who didn't seem to have no name, and had mighty little to say for himself."

"But it is my opinion dat he was de boss of de gang!" Faker Larkins declared.

"Mebbe so, but it don't make a bit of difference to me whether he was or not!" Old Sunflower declared. "I am arter the stuff, and I don't care the wag of a sheep's tail who sells 'em to me so long as I kin git a good trade."

"I just asked arter this thing out of pure curiosity, you know," the Westerner explained.

"The fellers in the West who put me up to the game said the Frenchman was the man who runs the gang, and that was the reason why I told you to go for him, but as I said afore, all I want is the stuff, and I am prepared to trade, if the goods are up to the mark and they ar' willing to take my figures."

"How soon will you be ready?" Sodger Flynn asked.

"Any time to-morrow, or the day after, or whenever the parties ar' ready, but the quicker the trade is made the better I will be pleased!" the Westerner declared.

"I think we kin settle the t'ing to morrow," Sodger Flynn replied. "The big Irish bloke who did about all de talking sed dat if you had de cash de deal could be made to-morrow."

"I am ready to put up at a couple of hours' notice," Old Sunflower responded, promptly.

"I ain't no walking National Bank, you know, and I don't carry all my roll 'round with me; but jest you name the time and place and you kin bet your sweet life that I will show up all right!"

"Do you know where Baxter street is?" Sodger Flynn inquired.

"Down Park Row way somewhar, I reckon."

"Dat's right; meet me at de corner of Baxter street and Park Row at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon and I t'ink de trick kin be done!"

"All right! I will be on hand!"

And then Old Sunflower happened to glance at the clock on the wall.

"B'gosh! it's time I was gitting to my roost!" he exclaimed. "So-long, boys!"

The Westerner hurried home as soon as possible, sat down and wrote a long letter, then went out to the Branch Post-office on Grand street and mailed it.

The toughs would have opened their eyes if they could have seen the superscription on the letter, for it was addressed to the superintendent of police.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SPRINGING THE SNARE.

PROMPTLY at the appointed time, three in the afternoon, Old Sunflower made his appearance on the upper corner of Baxter street and Park Row.

The two hard customers were in waiting.

"You are right on time," Sodger Flynn remarked.

"Oh, yes, that is the sort of ha'rpin I am," the Westerner replied. "When it comes to business, you will find that I am right on deck every time."

"We will have to go a couple of blocks up the street, where we will find the blokes waiting with the stuff," Sodger Flynn explained.

Old Sunflower surveyed the two fellows for a moment, a quizzical expression upon his face which puzzled him.

"I say, old pard, I hope this hyer leetle thing is all straight," he observed, slowly.

"What do you mean?" Sodger Flynn asked, and the look upon his face was one of genuine wonder.

"Why I hope you ain't trying to rope me into no gun game, for if you ar', I tell you right now that you won't make anything by it!" the Westerner asserted.

"Ah, come off! what is de matter wid you, anyway?" Sodger Flynn cried, in disgust.

"What put dat idee in your head?" Faker Larkins demanded. "You must take us for a couple of chumps!"

"Oh, no; you two fellers ar' up to the mark, I reckon," Old Sunflower replied.

"What you don't know in the way of deviltry ain't worth knowing I'll bet! but I am giving you a pointer right now that if this hyer is a game to git me in a hole, thar will be some sick and sore men 'round when the thing is worked."

"Ah, no, we wouldn't try anyt'ing of de kind, would we, Faker, hey?"

"Bet eber-life we wouldn't!" the other responded, with great dignity.

"When it comes to a deal with a pal, Sodger and me is jest as square as a die," the ruffian continued.

"Wal, I should hope so, and I kin jest tell you, boys, without any bragging, mind you, that it wouldn't be healthy for a gang, no matter if thar was a dozen of them, to try any funny business cn me," Old Sunflower observed.

"Don't you worry! the ting is straight!" Sodger Flynn replied.

"I hope it is, for no matter how strong a game was put up on me, I reckon I would make so vigorous a kick that it would be apt to be mighty unpleasant to the men who were working the thing."

"You two have already had a taste of my quality, and you must understand pretty well that when I git a-going I am a hull team with a big dog under the wagon!"

"Blame me! if I ever want to stack up ag'in' you as long as I live!" Sodger Flynn declared.

"Say, I wouldn't let you hit me ag'in for a hundred dollars!" Faker Larkins exclaimed.

"And you kin bet yer boots dat is saying a good deal, for a hundred cases is a big stake," he continued.

"Well, pard, I reckon I am about as tough a nut to crack as you kin scare up in all this big town, although I do say it who shouldn't," the Westerner asserted.

"You see, boys, a man has got to blow his horn sometimes, but I reckon you have got an idee that I ain't more than four miles and a half from the truth."

"I am pretty handy with my fists, and tolerably spry for an old man, but natur's wepons ain't my best holt, for if you want to see me fight for s'r, you ought to see me turned loose with a gun and a ten-inch bowie," Old Sunflower continued.

"The, if I ain't a match for a dozen ordinary men, I will give you one of my fingers to chaw, and I don't keer which one you take!"

"Say! I wish I may die if dis ting ain't on de dead straight as far as we are in it!" Sodger Flynn asserted, in the most earnest manner.

"Sodger is giving it to you as straight, as a string!" the other ruffian declared.

"And as we ain't in wid dis odder gang to try no game, you kin bet dat dey won't want any snap," Flynn argued.

"Who is it dat we are going to get our rake out of—dem odder blokes? Well, I guess not!"

"Wal, the thought came to me that mebbe the fellers, thinking I had the good money with me to pay for the queer, might take it into their heads that they could jump on me and clean me out, but you kin bet all you ar' worth that thar would be some pretty badly hurt men around afore the game was ended."

"Ah, no, dis here gang ain't got der backbone to do anyt'ing of dat kind—he, Faker?"

"Naw!" the other responded, promptly. "De Irishman is a big stuff, and de Dago would never put up a good scrap widout he had a big gang at his back."

"Wal, if it's all right let's go on, then," Old Sunflower remarked.

"How far did you say it was?" he continued.

"Two blocks up de street," Sodger Flynn answered.

"De Dago has a friend who lives on de second fl'r, and he picked out dat place to pull de ting off 'cos nobody will hold her us."

"Go ahead."

Up the street went the three, compelled to run the gauntlet of all the pullers-in for the

second-hand clothing stores, who spotted [the Westerner for a legitimate prey as soon as they set eyes on him.

When they came to the house, Old Sunflower halted in the doorway to take a look around him.

It was a tall brick tenement. On the ground floor was a dingy-looking liquor saloon, and above the house seemed to fairly swarm with tenants.

"This hyer looks all right," the Westerner observed. "I reckon any gang would be a fool to try any game whar violence would have to be used in a house like this, full of people."

"Oh, everyt'ing is all right!" Sodger Flynn declared. "De Dago got de use of a big front room from a pal of his'n, so we could fix de ting up in good shape."

"Wal, if they ar' as hot for business as I am, it will not take us long to put the matter through," Old Sunflower observed.

"Go ahead!" he continued, apparently satisfied at last that no deception was intended.

Up the stairs went the three, Sodger Flynn in the advance, Faker Larkins next, while the Westerner brought up the rear.

Half-way up, Old Sunflower spoke.

"The front room on the furst floor, did you say?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Flynn.

"Wal, I am glad it ain't any higher up, for these ar' about the toughest stairs to climb that I have struck in a dog's age!" the Westerner declared.

When he arrived on the landing, Sodger Flynn knocked at the first door.

It was opened by the red-bearded Irishman, Pauden McGunnigal, whose acquaintance the reader has previously made.

"Aba, is it yeess?" the Irishman exclaimed. "Come in b'yess! we were either waiting for yeess."

The three accepted the invitation.

Within the apartment, which was a scantily-furnished one, sat a gray-haired, gray-bearded man, poorly dressed, with a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, and the Italian, Ginney John.

Great was the surprise of the Irishman and the Italian when Old Sunflower marched into the apartment, closing the door behind him, and even the old man started as though the Westerner was no stranger to him.

"Bloody murther!" cried McGunnigal.

"Aba! what you wanna here!" exclaimed the Italian, jumping to his feet in alarm, while the two toughs stared in amazement, unable to account for the sensation which the presence of their companion produced.

"Wal, skin me alive!" cried Old Sunflower, "if this hyer ain't the biggest kind of a surprise I wouldn't say so."

"I tell you what it is, pard, I r'ally didn't expect to meet old acquaintances in this hyer way."

"Oh, you are acquainted wid de gang?" Sodger Flynn exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, I met these hyer two gentlemen once, but I must admit that I didn't have much time to cultivate their acquaintance, for they lit out in the blamest kind of a hurry in about two minutes arter I fu'st saw 'em. Haw, haw, haw!" and the Westerner laughed at the top of his lungs.

"Phat the devil do yees want here!" McGunnigal exclaimed, angrily.

"Why, I am the man who has come to make a trade," Old Sunflower exclaimed. "But, I sw'ar, you ar' about the last man I expected to see."

"Now, though, I begin to git the idee of that shanty up the river into my head," the Westerner continued.

"That is the workshop, hey, whar you git up the stuff! Blame me! if that ar ain't a mighty good notion. I reckon that it would have to be an extra smart detective who could nose out that trick."

"What are yees afther talking about?" McGunnigal demanded, with great dignity.

"Oh, ho, ho!" laughed the Westerner, "you don't understand, of course, for you are terrible innocent all of a sudden."

"This hyer is the bloke who has come to make a trade for the stuff," Sodger Flynn remarked at this point, thinking it was time an explanation was made.

"Yes, sir-ee, boss fly!" the Westerner exclaimed. "I am the man who is willing to put up the good solid stuff provided I git a fair deal for my money, but I won't stand any gun game, you know."

"You can't ring no little bunco business in on me," he continued.

"No valises to be sent by Express, or any games of that kind, for I will not have it, but if you ar' ripe for a good squar' trade, and have got stuff that is right up to the mark, I reckon we kin do business together."

"Oh, are you the gentleman who is afther investing?" the Irishman asked.

"Yes, I am the party, and I come hyer with my pals to do business, but the stuff has got to be good or else I can't handle it."

"Oh, it is jist illegal!" McGunnigal declared.

"No better was ever put on the market, do ye mind?"

"That is good—that is the kind I want," the Westerner replied.

"Do you want to close the business, me jewel?" the Irishman asked.

"You bet! that is what I am here for!" Old Sunflower declared.

"But I want you to understand, right at the beginning, you know, that this hyer thing has got be worked on the square," he continued. "I am not buying any cats in bags, you know. I propose to put up the good solid cash and I want a sight for my money. No sight—no money, you savvey, hey?"

And the Westerner grinned in the most good-natured way in the face of the other.

"Oho! that is all right, me bucko!" McGunnigal re lied. "Sure, we wouldn't be afther taking your money if we couldn't give you the worth of it in the most illigant flim-seys that ye ever saw in all yer born days!"

"That is what I am arter. Trot 'em out!" Old Sunflower exclaimed in a loud tone.

Immediately the door was thrown open and a half-dozen policemen rushed into the room.

At the same moment the Westerner plunged forward to seize the old man.

But quick as was Old Sunflower the old man was quicker still.

He sat on the right of the apartment near a door which led into a hall bedroom, and the moment that the Westerner raised his voice, he seemed to suspect that a signal had been given, and he made a rush for the door, slamming it in Old Sunflower's face.

The Westerner threw himself against the door, but it was a stout one and the fugitive had evidently locked it on the other side, for it did not yield.

Finding the door was firm the Westerner rushed to the entry expecting to find the old man hastening down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOT YET.

OLD SUNFLOWER was disappointed in this expectation; the fugitive was not in sight.

"B'gosh! I never thought of the window!" he cried, and then he dashed madly down into the street.

As he had expected he found that a crowd had collected.

Twenty-five or thirty people had gathered in the middle of the street and on the opposite sidewalk and were gazing with all the eyes in their heads at the open window of the hall bedroom.

Under the window was a stout wooden awning, so it was an easy matter for a man to get from the window to the awning and then descend to the street.

"Which way did he go?" asked the Westerner eagerly.

Half-a-dozen in the crowd attempted to answer the question, but as no two of them told the same story Old Sunflower was not able to gain any information of value.

Cunning as had been the trap which he had planned yet he had not succeeded in catching the head of the gang, for the Westerner was satisfied that the old man held that position.

"Darn the blamed rascal!" Old Sunflower declared as he made his way up-stairs again. "He has got the best of me this time and no mistake, but I will keep on trying, and, sooner or later, I will have him in the net."

The Westerner found an extremely disgusted set of men when he re-entered the apartment.

The bluecoats had made prisoners of all of them and had just finished a thorough search of the men when Old Sunflower returned.

"Wal, boys, this hyer is kinder of a surprise party I suppose?" he observed with one of his peculiar grins.

"Ye may well say that and widout the l'aste taste of a lie!" McGunnigal exclaimed in a truly disconsolate manner.

"Some day I stick a knife in you, ha!" Ginney John cried with ferocious accents.

"Ah, go way with you, Signor Maccaroni!" the Westerner replied, contemptuously.

"If you should stick a knife in me, and I should find it out, I would take you by the nape of the neck and crack your heels together until I broke your backbone in two."

Although this speech was decidedly more jocular than ferocious, yet Old Sunflower uttered it in such a way as to make the Italian cower before him.

"How did the search pan out?" the Westerner asked of the sergeant in command of the squad.

"Both of these men had bad money," the officer replied, indicating the Irishman and the Italian.

"Only a few dollars apiece, though; not enough to amount to anything," he added.

"Shure! I'm a stranger in the country and not familiar wid de money yit," the Irishman declared.

"It is no wonder dat I should have some bad money whin, poor innocent cr'atur' that I am, I can't tell the difference between good money and bad."

"And the Ginney is in de same way, too, isn't that so, John?" he added.

"Me no tella gooda, bada monie!" the Italian declared, shaking his head in a mournful way.

"Say, rocks, this here is a rough joke on us, and I hope you will tell de cops dat we don't train wid any bad money gang!" Sodger Flynn exclaimed.

"Yes, boss, tell de peelers dat we ain't in it!" Faker Larkins cried.

"Ar' you two willing to give evidence how you arranged with this hyer gang to sell me counterfeit bills and bogus coin?" Old Sunflower demanded.

The pair looked at each other for a moment, and then Sodger Flynn said:

"Say, boss, it is awful rough to make me peach on a pal; none of the boys will want to trust me afterwards."

"Der gang will give us de grand bounce!" the other ruffian asserted.

"I reckon that you are in sich a scrape that you will have to face the music this time!" the Westerner declared.

"Well, we will have to talk wid de lawyer, and, in course, we will do as he say," Sodger Flynn remarked.

Old Sunflower understood what this meant. The fellow had made up his mind to make a clean breast of it, but wanted to keep the matter quiet as long as possible.

The prisoners were removed to the city prison, and there the detectives endeavored to get a confession out of the Irishman and Italian in regard to the man who had escaped.

Not a bit of satisfaction did the bloodhounds get, though.

Both of the men swore in the most positive manner that they knew absolutely nothing about the old man; he was a stranger to them, and all they knew of him was that he was a relative or friend of the Italian who occupied the apartment.

In regard to the charge that they had made an arrangement to sell bad money, they declared it was not so.

They accounted for their presence in the room by saying that they had come there to make a friendly call upon the owner, and were completely surprised when Old Sunflower's party came into the room.

The detectives soon saw that they stood no chance of getting any information from either of the two.

Apparently they had faith that their chief would succeed in getting out of the scrape, and they were firmly determined not to utter a word which would aid the bloodhounds of the law in getting upon his track.

A squad of officers made a raid on the old houses up on the Jersey shore, and, thanks to the information which the Westerner had received from the wife of the doctor, they discovered the secret haunts of the gang.

As Old Sunflower had anticipated, the cellars were the work-shops of the rascals.

A large amount of bad money was captured, also the tools, dies, printing presses, etc., used by the scoundrels in their endeavors to fleece the community.

But, despite the most urgent search, no clew was found that would lead to the capture of the skillful boss of the gang.

"Not yet, not yet!" Old Sunflower muttered. "But I will have him in the long run, unless I am greatly mistaken!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAWYER'S LITTLE GAME.

The Westerner did not fail to be on hand in the neighborhood of the private detective's office at the time fixed upon.

He took position in a doorway directly opposite, so as to be able to keep a good watch.

"Even if the old rascal should happen to catch sight of me, my presence here would not be apt to alarm him," Old Sunflower mused.

"For, no matter how cute he may be, it would not be possible for him to suspect that I was concerning myself about his affairs.

"I know him, and just what kind of a feller he is, while he is not aware of the existence of such a man as myself, and that is what I possess a big advantage, and it will be mighty strange if I don't succeed in cleaning him right out of his boots in this hyer leetle game."

The Westerner remained on the watch for nearly an hour before he was gratified by a sight of the man for whom he waited.

Then the old lawyer came forth, stood for a few minutes on the corner under the gas-lanap, waiting for a car, and the Westerner, watching intently, could see that he was chuckling with delight.

"Oho! you reckon, I think, that you have got things fixed so you can't help winning this leetle game."

"You ar' an old man, Elijah, and, of course, have seen a deal of life, and you ought to have learned a long while ago that this is a mighty onsayt'in world."

"All we can r'ally count on is death and taxes!" Old Sunflower declared, with the air of a philosopher.

Then the car came along, Kembroke boarded it, and was carried down-town.

"Now I reckon thar's a chance for a man 'bout my size to see how the old thing is working," the Westerner remarked, as he strode across the street and ascended the stairs to the office of the private detective.

Munell expected him, and waved his hand to a seat as Old Sunflower entered.

"Help yourself to a chair," he said. "Sorry to keep you waiting so long, but the old fellow was very long in coming to the point—very much disposed to beat about the bush, you understand."

"Oh, yes, he had some piece of rascality to propose to you, I suppose, and consequently it took him some time to gloss the thing over, so as to make it appear all fair and above-board."

"By Jove! Flowers, you must be a regular mind-reader!" the other declared, amazed.

"Wal, I don't know 'bout that, but I reckon I kin see as far into a millstone as the next man," the Westerner replied with one of his good-natured grins.

"You couldn't have explained any better what he was driving at if you had set here and listened to the whole conversation!" the private detective asserted.

"I afters was a great hand to guess riddles," the other explained.

"It is evident that you have not lost any of your old-time talent for the detective business."

"No, I reckon that none of it has got away—at least not as I knows on," the Westerner responded with another grin.

"I got after the foreman of the scarf shop today, and I cultivated his acquaintance and the acquaintance of all of his friends that I could get at, and I think I may safely declare that I know the man from A to Izzard."

"I reckon that he didn't pan out well," Old Sunflower observed, slowly.

"That is another wonderful correct guess—how on earth 'do you work it?'" exclaimed the private detective in surprise.

"Why, it is just as simple as rolling off a log," the Westerner replied in his easy, good-natured way.

"All a man has got to do is to keep his eyes open and he will see a lot of wonderful things in this world."

"I watched the Chicago man when he got out; he was chuckling to himself, smiling all over his face, you know, and that was a clear sign he was well satisfied with the way things were going."

"Now then, having a suspicion that he intended to work some game by the aid of the foreman, and the bigger the rascal the foreman is the more easy it will be for him to do the job, isn't it natural for me to suppose when I see the old lawyer so well satisfied, that he has made the discovery the foreman is just the kind of man whom he wants to do business with."

"I see how you git at it now, and as you say, it is extremely simple—when you know how to do it—but the trouble is that not one man out of ten thousand can put two and two together after this fashion."

"But you have got to do it in our line, you know, or you will be left, and the man who is left isn't right," Old Sunflower observed with one of his comical grins.

"No, I should say not."

"Well, the foreman is just such a man as the old fellow needs, a stingy and yet rather dissipated fellow, one of the kind who would be willing to sell his soul if he could find any one fool enough to buy it."

"Now what do you suppose the old lawyer's game is with the foreman?"

"Wants to git him to 'fire' the gal," the Westerner responded, immediately.

"Blame me if you havn't hit it again!" the private detective exclaimed.

"Didn't I tell you I was death on guessing?" the Westerner responded.

"And this thing is so easy, too, that I didn't have to half try," Old Sunflower continued.

"He wants to marry the gal; she is making a good living, and don't need a husband."

"Git her fired—stop the supplies, and then she may come to the conclusion that a husband to pay the bills will be a very handy thing to have around the house."

"You have got it down fine, I think, but the old man gets at it in a different way. He says all the girl's relatives in Chicago are very much opposed to her being on here in New York working in a shop; they have plenty of money, and want her to come and live with them, and as this romantic idea of hers of earning her own living is absurd, so it would really be a kindly act to get the young woman out of the shop; then, if she loses her job, the chances are she can be persuaded to go back to her sorrowing relatives, who would give anything to keep her with them, because they think so much of her."

"I say, the old man ought to go into the story-writing line!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"This hyer beautiful and pathetic yarn does him a deal of credit."

"Oh, he is a wily old scoundrel!" the private detective declared.

"I s'pose he has taken great care to fix this thing so that if thar should be a slump-up any-

whar, he will not be in it," the Westerner observed.

"You are right; that is just the way he has planned the game. He wants to put me forward to take all the responsibility. His story is that he is acting for the girl's relatives in Chicago, and so he does not want to be known in the matter."

"How much is he willing to give to have the gal discharged?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"Wal, that is pretty liberal, I should say," the Westerner remarked, thoughtfully.

"I reckon thar isn't any doubt 'bout that offer ketching the foreman!"

"Oh, no, I think fifteen would do the business, but I put the figure at twenty-five so as to give me a chance to get a little rake-off," the private detective remarked, with a knowing smile.

"That is all right, of course—that is business!" the veteran remarked.

"Or what a good many men call business, nowadays," Old Sunflower continued, dryly. "If the purchaser is willing to give twenty-five, and the seller is satisfied with fifteen, why shouldn't the middleman—the agent—grab the ten?"

"Certainly! a man must live," the other observed, not detecting that the visitor was speaking sarcastically.

"What did you charge him for conducting this leetle negotiation?"

"A tanner! That is what I am to get if I put the thing through successfully."

"I will give you twenty for 'blowing the gaft' on the old chap!"

"Good! that is liberal, I must say!" and the private detective rubbed his hands together briskly, highly delighted with the way things were going.

"Really, you know, I didn't think there was much money in this job when I took hold, but it certainly looks now as if I was going to make a good thing out of it: that is, if it is your game to let the scheme go on," and a wishful look appeared on Munell's face.

Ob, yes, go right ahead, jest as if I wasn't in the business at all."

"That is good!" the other exclaimed. "I am glad you decided to allow me to make the rake, for business has been anything but go d with me for the last three months and I need the money in the worst way."

"That is all right, I will give you a chance to get every dollar out of the thing that thar is in it," Old Sunflower replied.

"How did you propose to arrange this thing?"

"Well, I was to see the foreman to-morrow at noon and make the proposition to him, then the old fellow was to come to the office here at night to pay me the money so as to complete the business the next day."

"Lemme see," Old Sunflower observed, thoughtfully. "Have you got two rooms here?" and he fixed his eyes on a glass door opposite to where he sat.

"Yes, yonder is a small room which I use as a private office."

"That will do first rate!" the Westerner declared.

"Now, then, this is the game. You see the foreman to-morrow and go ahead jest as if thar wasn't any 'throwing down' in the business."

"Yes?"

"The lawyer is to come at eight to-morrow night same as this evening?"

"At eight."

"When he comes tell him that you have got the matter all arranged with the man, and you thought it advisable in order to make him satisfied he was getting a square deal to arrange to have the foreman come to this office."

"Explain to him that he can be in the inner room thar with the door ajar so he kin hear all that goes on."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Of course you will not pay the foreman anything until he signs an agreement binding himself to discharge the gal and also agreeing not to take the gal back, or else you wouldn't have any hold on him; he might take the mon'y, you know, and then laugh at you for being fool enough to trust to his word."

"Oh, yes, I thought of fixing up some arrangement of that kind, for the fellow is a slippery customer and I would not dare to trust him."

"You kin fix the hull thing up hyer to-morrow night. Whar does that solid door yonder lead—to a closet?" and the Westerner pointed to the other side of the room from where the first door was situated.

"Yes."

"Wal, that will do furst-rate for me, for I have got to overhear this hull blamed business."

"Do you calculate to tackle the lawyer here in the office?" the private detective asked, a little apprehensively.

"Oh, no! don't you worry a mite 'bout that," the veteran replied.

"I told you that I would fix the thing so no blame could be attached to you, and you kin depend upon my keeping to my word, every time!"

Old Sunflower then rose to depart.

"I will be on hand at seven sharp so as to be in plenty of time," he said. "So-long!"

Away he went, and when he got on the street he grinned and cried:
"I'll nail my Chicago friend to-morrow night, for keeps!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII. PUTTING ON THE SCREWS.

NOTHING of interest concerning the characters of our tale occurred during the next day, and Old Sunflower kept himself secluded until after nightfall; then he called upon the chief of police, and after a brief interview took his way to the office of the private detective.

Munell was ready for him, and had arranged the closet for his accommodation.

"How did you make out with the foreman?" the Westerner asked.

"Oh, I hadn't the slightest trouble in coming to an arrangement with him," the other answered.

"You see, as it happens, the man is desperate ly in want of money just now, and so he fairly jumped at the chance to make a stake."

"He didn't like the idea of signing a paper, though, for fear that it might get him into a scrape in some way, and so I had to give him the twenty-five in order to induce him to come up to the scratch."

"Oh, wal, we can't allers have things our own way in this hyer life, you know," Old Sunflower observed, with the air of a philosopher.

"We must grab what we kin and be thankful for gitting anything."

"Yes, I believe you are right," Munell observed. "I don't suppose I have any right to kick, seeing what I stand to make out of this game."

"Oh, no, your rake will be a pretty good one as rakes goes."

Then the Westerner retired to the closet and prepared to make himself comfortable during his wait.

The closet had been used for spying purposes before, and there was a secret sliding panel in the door, which Munell showed to his visitor, arranged so a listener could both hear and see all that went on in the main office.

Promptly at the appointed time the Chicago man made his appearance, and Munell contrived that he should take a seat with his back to Old Sunflower's hiding-place, so the spy could make use of the sliding panel.

The private detective proceeded at once to business, and related the particulars of the bargain which he had made with the foreman, concluding by explaining the arrangement he had made with the man to come there at half-past eight for the purpose of signing the agreement.

"I fixed the affair this way so you would have a chance to be certain that everything was all right," he said, in conclusion.

"Yes, yes, I comprehend. A capital idea, my dear Mr. Munell!" the old lawyer declared.

"Although, really, as far as I am concerned, there is no need of it, for I have the most perfect confidence in you," he affirmed, with a polite bow.

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion," the private detective responded, returning an equally elaborate bow.

"My customers usually have great faith in me, but I have made it a rule since I have been in this business, where, I am sorry to say, there is a deal of trickery and deceit, to arrange matters so that my clients could be absolutely certain that I was faithfully attending to their business."

"Oho!" muttered Old Sunflower to himself. "I reckon it is a toss-up as to which one of the two is the champion liar."

"About time for the man, isn't it?" Kembroke remarked, consulting his watch.

"Yes, he should be here in a few minutes."

"I will retire, then. Here is the twenty-five, by the way," he said, giving Munell the money.

"By holding the door ajar you will be able to hear all that passes as well as if you were in the room."

"Ah, yes, thanks!" exclaimed the old lawyer, as he entered the inner office.

Five minutes later, the foreman made his appearance, a mean-looking little man, who appeared like the sneak which he was.

The private detective proceeded promptly to business. He produced the agreement which he had drawn up and read it over to the man.

The foreman objected to sign it, saying that if it should happen to be made public it would certainly result in his being "fired" as well as the girl.

"Ah, well, no signature no money," Munell replied. "My principal must have something to hold you, you know, or else you could take the twenty-five and then laugh at us."

"Oh, I wouldn't do such a mean thing!" the fellow exclaimed in virtuous indignation.

"I always make it a rule never to give a man a chance to go back on me," the private detective observed, quietly.

"Here is the money, by the way," and he spread the five five-dollar bills out on the table.

The temptation was too much for the man, his eyes fell gloating upon the money, and he said:

"All right! I will sign the paper, but I rely upon your honor not to give the thing 'way!"

"Of course not! wouldn't I get my people in trouble if I did that?"

"Yes, it ought to be kept quiet for all our sakes."

Then the foreman signed the paper and Munell gave him the money.

"I will 'fire' the girl to-morrow night," he said. "I can easily pretend that her work isn't good enough for our trade, and none of the bosses ever interfere between me and the hands. Much obliged!"

After the fellow had gone the old lawyer made his appearance.

"Aha! you managed that capitally, I must say!" he declared in great delight.

"By the way, I may as well settle with you now, and I will give you an extra ten if you will look after the fellow and see that he keeps his agreement," Kembroke continued.

"All right! I will attend to it."

The Chicago man counted out the money.

"Thanks!" the private detective exclaimed as he pocketed the bills.

"Now how about this paper?" he asked. "Will you take or shall I keep it?"

"Oh, it had better remain in your possession, so you will be able to keep this fellow up to the mark," the old lawyer replied, and then it is my wish, you know, to keep in the background. I do not desire to become known in the affair at all."

"I will take care that you are not brought into it."

"Much obliged!" the Chicago man responded. "I am highly delighted with the splendid way in which you have managed this affair, and if I ever have any business in your line again I will be sure to give you a call."

"I will try and do the best I can for you!"

Then the wily old lawyer departed.

Old Sunflower made his appearance.

"I reckon I will have to compliment you too, on the way you have worked this thing," the Westerner declared.

"Hyer's a fifty-dollar note for you and I will take charge of that paper."

"Say! don't you go and get me in any scrape you know," Munell said, hesitating.

"Oh, that is all right. Don't you be scared! I am going to put the screws on this fat rascal so that arter I git through he will not have courage enough to utter a peep."

"As soon as I drop him he will scoot back to Chicago as quick as the Iron Horse kin carry him and you kin bet all you ar' worth that it will be many a long day afore you ketch him in this hyer city of New York ag'in!"

"All right! here it is, but I trust you to see me through safe."

Old Sunflower took the agreement and put it away carefully in his capacious wallet.

"Whar is the old cuss staying?"

"At the Astor House."

"I must interview him, and I have an idee he will come to the conclusion afore the thing is over that the process is not allers a pleasant one."

The Westerner departed, took a street car and in due time arrived at the hotel.

After entering he discovered the old lawyer ascending the stairs.

"That is good!" the veteran muttered. "For it saves me the trouble of having to hunt him up."

So the Westerner marched up-stairs in the rear of the Chicago man.

Kembroke went to his room, a front apartment on the third story.

Old Sunflower waited until he was fairly in his room and then he too entered without taking the trouble to knock.

The Chicago man was just about to sit down as the Westerner made his appearance, but started to his feet again surprised by the intrusion.

"Sit down—sit down and make yourself comfortable for I have come to have a good long talk with you!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"Eh? havn't you made some mistake?" exclaimed the other, amazed.

"I reckon not!" and the new-comer helped himself to a chair.

"You name is Kembroke, Elijah Kembroke, and you are a lawyer from Chicago?"

"That is correct—that is my name," remarked the lawyer. "But, really, I do not remember ever encountering you before."

"That ain't strange, for I reckon you never did," the Westerner replied in his cool and careless way.

"But I will introduce myself and then you will know me the next time."

"My name is Jonathan Flowers and I am a detective officer."

"Ah, a detective officer," the old lawyer repeated, slowly, and evidently disturbed, although he endeavored to conceal it to the best of his ability.

"Yes, sir, that is the profession I follow, and I reckon that just now I have an unpleasant duty to perform."

"Really, I must confess that I am unable to comprehend what you are driving at!" the old gentleman exclaimed, more and more uneasy.

"Mr. Kembroke, I don't know what your reputation may be in Chicago—you may pass for a pretty smart man thar, but when you come to be sized up hyer in New York, you ar' not in it, by a jugful!"

"Sir?" exclaimed Kembroke, completely mystified by this strange announcement.

"You ought not to have left Chicago—you hav'n't any business to be hyer in New York whar you ar' going to git skinned from the start, although you do think you ar' as sharp as they make 'em."

"Upon my word, sir, I am not able to make head nor tail of this extraordinary language!" the old gentleman declared, trying his best to conceal his agitation.

"And to think that a lawyer, too, of all men in the world, should be guilty of making so bad a break!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Will you have the kindness, sir, to make an end of these vague insinuations and tell me plainly what you mean?" Kembroke exclaimed, endeavoring to present a stern front.

"Have you any idee that detectives have been on your track ever since you struck New York?" the Westerner asked, abruptly.

"Impossible!" cried the lawyer, his face paling.

"Oh, no, it isn't. Many a man, far smarter than you ever dared to be, has been shadowed without his having the slightest suspicion that his every movement was watched."

"This is monstrous!" the old fellow declared, endeavoring to assume an appearance of righteous indignation, but his trembling lips and hands rendered the deception perfectly plain.

"Wal, tain't half so monstrous as the game which you have been playing, but the jig is up now for sure!" Old Sunflower declared.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

JUSTICE AT LAST.

The old lawyer was so completely taken by surprise that he did not know what to say, and in his confusion he stammered:

"Why should a watch be placed upon a respectable citizen like myself?"

"Because jest now you ar' engaged in a mighty mean piece of business," Old Sunflower retorted.

"Mebbe you may be under the delusion that I am telling you a little fairy story 'bout this shadow business, but I will soon show you what a mistake that is."

"You ar' making war in the meanest kind of a way upon an unprotected orphan girl."

The old lawyer started, for this declaration convinced him that he was indeed in danger.

"You bothered her with your attentions so she left Chicago and came on here," the Westerner continued. "By a mean underhand trick you found out her address, which she tried to keep concealed from you, and came on hyer, and about the first thing you did arter you struck the city was to hire a private detective to shadow the girl."

The under jaw of the old rascal dropped, for, although he did his best to think his opponent was only "bluffing," yet this statement showed him that he had indeed been watched.

"You visited Miss Scarlett, and she played possum so as to lead you on; that was by my advice, you understand, for I had come to the conclusion that you were one of the kind of schemers who, if given rope enough, would surely hang himself in the long run."

"Then you got up the job through this private detective to git the foreman of the scarf-house to discharge the gal, calculating that if she got out of work she might make up her mind to accept your offer of marriage."

"I got onto that racket, though, and it did not take me long to bu'st it all to thunder."

"With my witnesses I was in a room next to the private detective's office, and had the thing so arranged that we could both see and hear all that went on."

"So I kin prove that you hired Munell to bribe the foreman to discharge the gal—it was your money paid for it, and arter you got out I lit on the private detective like a thousand of bricks."

"He weakened, of course; he couldn't help it, when I had him dead to rights, and, to show you that I am not giving you any ghost story, here is the agreement!"

The wily lawyer gazed at the paper for a moment in dire confusion, then, thinking the worst was over, he plucked up courage.

"Well, well! supposing that all this is true—it is not a hanging matter," he declared.

"I may be an old fool to run after a girl young enough to be my daughter—I have no doubt that the world-at-large if this affair is made public will affirm that I am an old idiot, and for awhile I shall be the laughing-stock of the country."

"No doubt I have gone too far in my eagerness to get the girl," he continued. "But really I do not believe I will be hanged, or even imprisoned for life on account of my dreadful crimes; ., sir, I fancy your mountain will not turn out to be much larger than a mole-hill, after all."

"You are undoubtedly a very smart fellow, although you do look like a countryman from

"wayback," the old lawyer added, in a sarcastic way.

"You have certainly worked this case up very cleverly, but I must declare that it is my impression you have taken a great deal of pains for very little gains."

"It will be a triumph to you, I presume, to hold me up to the ridicule of the world, but I question very seriously whether that success is worth the trouble which you must have been to in this affair."

Old Sunflower nodded in a self-satisfied way when the wily lawyer finished his speech, and then he drew from his breast-pocket an official-looking document, which he proceeded to unfold.

Kembroke watched him with visible anxiety, wondering what was to come now.

"I have hyer a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Kembroke, and I shall be obliged to ask you to come with me to Police Headquarters; but as I always make it a rule to be as easy as I can in such cases, I will not put the handcuffs on if you will give me your word of honor as a gentleman that you will go along quietly."

"You couldn't escape, anyway, and it would be foolish for you to try it."

Kembroke sunk into a chair, for he had remained on his feet until now.

"A warrant for my arrest!" he gasped. "Upon what charge?"

"Obtaining money under false pretenses. The complaint recites that, some five years ago, in Chicago, one Valentine Scarlett intrusted to your care fifty thousand dollars in United States bonds to invest for him, but instead of so doing you took advantage of his being called away on business to appropriate the money to your own uses."

"My heavens! has Scarlett come back?" completely breaking down.

"No, he is dead; died here in New York just about a month after he placed the money in your hands."

"This suit is brought by his daughter and heir, Miss Camille Scarlett, and that is the reason why you ar' so anxious to marry the lady," the Westerner continued.

"You know that you have robbed the orphan girl of her fortune, and your game is to marry her, so that if the truth should ever be discovered she could not bring you to justice."

"No, no! it is not so bad as all that—I am not such an utter scoundrel as you have tried to make me out," the old gentleman declared, trembling with nervous excitement.

"Since the thing has come out, it isn't of any use for me to attempt to fight."

"I will make a clean breast of it, and throw myself upon your mercy."

"Go ahead, and if you give me a fair deal, you kin bet your life that I will do the squar' thing by you!" Old Sunflower declared.

"I attended to some small matters for Mr. Scarlett, and when he got the fifty thousand dollars in bonds he asked my advice about putting the money in some safe investment."

"I recommended a certain building containing stores and offices, well rented."

"He bought the property, but had the title placed in his wife's name, so he said, if anything should happen to him his wife and child would not want."

"Yes, yes."

"He was a peculiar man, and instructed me never to say a word to any one about the transaction, particularly to his wife or daughter."

"I complied with the request of course. He left the property entirely in my hands, I collected the rents, paid the taxes, and in fact acted so much like the owner that everybody believed it was mine."

"Then Scarlett disappeared."

"No one but I knew anything about the property so I collected the money, as usual, and held on to it, but as time passed on and the wife, after her vain search for her husband, about worried herself into the grave, the idea came to me that it would be a good speculation to marry the daughter."

"I couldn't get away with the property itself, I could retain the moneys coming from it until I died unless some unforeseen accident, not likely to happen, should reveal the truth."

"You ar' right! thar ar' plenty of bigger rascals in the world than you ar', but I don't know 'bout thar being many meaner ones."

"Spare me! I am down—don't strike me!" the old gentleman protested.

"I am a rich man and will account for every cent. I am entitled to some little credit too, for I have taken good care of the property, and with my improvements, and the rise of land, Miss Camille can get a hundred thousand dollars for the property now if she wants to take it."

"S'pose you jest put this hyer leetle matter into writing," Old Sunflower suggested.

"Willingly! I give you my word, sir, that you will not have any trouble about the matter," the lawyer declared.

"All Miss Camille will have to do is to prove that she is her mother's daughter—and there will not be any difficulty about that, it is a mere legal form, you know—and she can take the title to the property."

"I presume you are acting for Miss Scarlett?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I suppose, then, you will be inclined to let this matter drop if I make ample restitution," the old gentleman pleaded.

"Oh, yes, thar will not be any trouble 'bout that, for women ain't usually inclined to be vindictive."

So the Chicago man wrote a full account of the transaction which he delivered to Old Sunflower.

"I will return to Chicago immediately," Mr. Kembroke said. And when Miss Scarlett comes she will find me anxious to do all in my power to assist her."

This ended the interview.

When Old Sunflower arrived at his room, he found all within the house had retired, so he was compelled to wait until morning to break the glad tidings to the young girl.

"I would have liked to have kept her on as a bait for the Frenchman," he soliloquized. "But it would not be right to keep her in ignorance."

But when morning came, the indefatigable man-hunter discovered that the wily Frenchman, who had so long baffled human justice, had been overtaken by Divine vengeance.

In the morning journals was an account of the death of Doctor Montlac, shot by his wife, who then had committed suicide.

But she was not dead, though mortally wounded, and had been carried to the hospital.

Old Sunflower hurried to her at once.

She was sinking fast, yet perfectly conscious.

"That human fiend saw me on the avenue by chance and tracked me to my room," she explained.

"I was desperate, and when with bitter taunts he told me that he had poisoned my husband and would yet kill me, for I stood between him and a fortune, I, crazy with fear and rage, shot him as I would a wild beast; then, in my frenzy, I turned my weapon upon myself."

"The wretch deserved to die, but you should have lived," the Westerner observed.

"Oh, I am sick of life!" she replied.

"You spoke of a man named Scarlett once," she continued. "The doctor told me just before I shot him that my treatment drove my husband to seek happiness under a false name, Scarlett, and he had a wife and child in the West. After my husband's death he found a letter from the wife among my husband's papers. Wretch that I was, I ruined his life!"

The woman sunk back, and in a few moments passed the portals of eternity.

Our tale is told.

Camille recovered her property, and rumor says is to be married to one of the young merchant princes of Chicago in the spring.

And Old Sunflower? Wait! you will hear more of him soon.

THE END.

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